

interzone

MAY 2000

NUMBER 155

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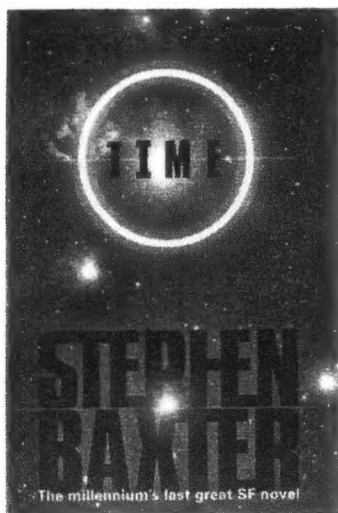
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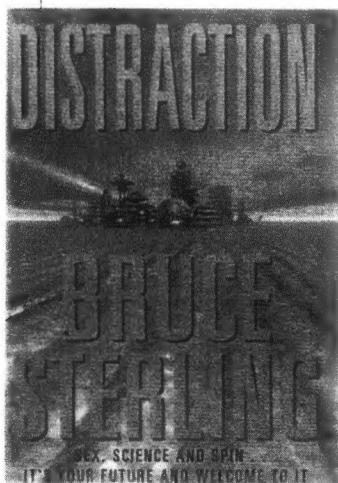
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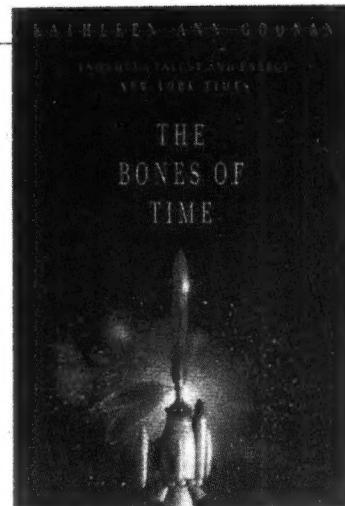
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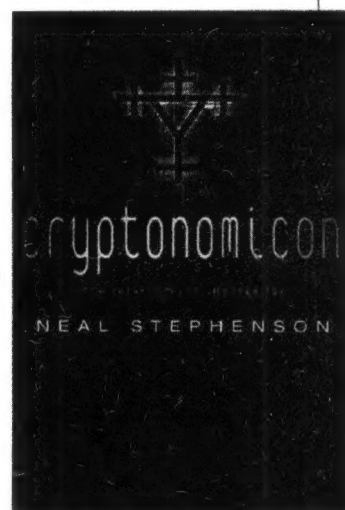
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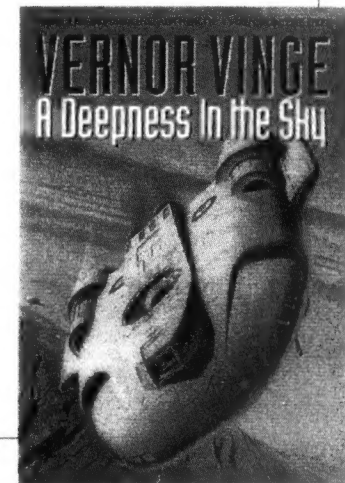


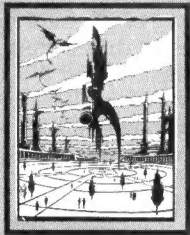
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interzone

science fiction & fantasy

MAY 2000

Number 155

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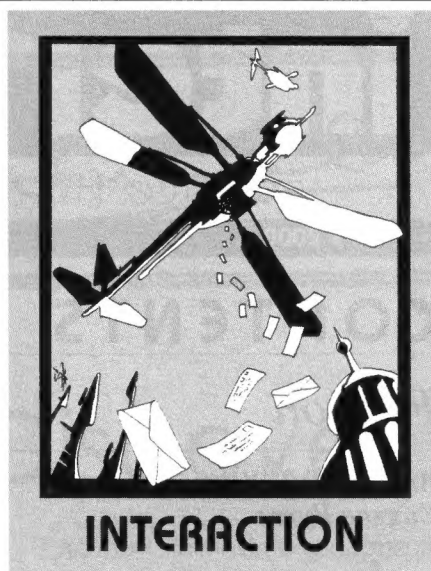
Dear Editors:

I have been reading *Interzone* for several years now, though I've never been a subscriber (regular cash flow has never been a strong feature of my life!). Before I say anything else, I would just like to congratulate the whole team and wish you all the best. Whatever criticisms may follow, *IZ* is still the most interesting and entertaining sf magazine around by quite a long stretch, and is evolving into one of the best-looking ones too.

Nineteen ninety-nine was a mixed year. There were several good issues, but at least one that was appalling. The contents varied in quality. One thing that seems to be reaching a consistent standard is the presentation — typefaces are clear and readable, layout is good, the cover art (barring a few dodgy examples) is generally reasonable and the interior illustrations no longer embarrassing, except for the thankfully increasingly rare lapses into unthinking sexism. More SMS vignettes! Top cover art of the year? April, May and June were all good, however my vote would go to June (by Trevor Scobie). However, the following three months were almost as dire as the previous ones had been good!

Presentation is, as Paul Brazier is always keen to stress, important, however a magazine like *Interzone* cannot survive on style alone. So, what of the contents? Starting with the articles and columns, which are always the first things I read: "Ansible Link" is amusing and fluffy as ever, but why doesn't David Langford do some reviewing? He used to be good at that. Nick Lowe's "Mutant Popcorn" is a different story. Sometimes Lowe appears to completely miss crucial elements in films; his review of *The Sixth Sense* for example was snobbish and full of post-hoc wise-arsedness, while at the same time misunderstanding some of the things he was criticizing — the locked cupboard was explained... However Lowe can often be perceptive. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for Gary Westfahl. In trying to be too many things (academic yet populist, learned yet homely), he usually misses his targets and simply ends up boring and sometimes egotistical. I have absolutely no interest in his home life or how his work for *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* was not used to his liking.

Interviews I can take or leave. The book reviews are where *IZ* really excels. Your regulars and occasional specialists all usually enlighten and entertain. My personal favourite is Paul J. McAuley; he manages to convey his critique without resorting to jargon, and appears both perceptive and wise. John Clute and Chris Gilmore are as erudite as ever, and David Mathew is gaining ground fast. Tom Arden is per-



haps the weakest of the regulars, prone to the odd slightly bizarre and unsupported opinion, but being the last in such a strong field is no insult.

Finally, the stories. Funnily enough, however bad the stories are at the time (and there were occasions when they seemed really bad!), I still buy *Interzone* and enjoy it, and on looking back over the year, there are certainly more highlights than shadows. First, the good ones. I was pleased to see a couple of stories in translation — this is something that *IZ* should try more often — and both Zoran Zivkovic's "The Astronomer" (complete with welcome anti-bombing afterword), and Jean-Claude Dunyach's "Footprints in the Snow" were well worth the effort. There were some good cautionary tales: in this varied vein, I liked Stephen Dedman's "The Lady Macbeth Blues," Robert Reed's "At the Corner of Darwin and Eternity" and Tom Arden's "The Volvox Immersion." Some things made me laugh, in particular Ivan Jurisevic's "Captain Starlight and the Flying Saucer" (perhaps the only good thing about the Australian issue), Helen Patrice's "Shaping Up" and Tony Ballantyne's "Soldier.exe," though with the latter it was more a case of a grim smile than a belly-laugh.

Two authors were consistently impressive. Mary Soon Lee's "Life-work" and "Tranquillity" were both first-rate emotionally satisfying pieces, and Alexander Glass produced not only the disturbing, melancholy "Forgotten Tongues" but also the literate, acid-surrealist nightmare, "The Mirror Repair'd," that got the year off to such a spectacular beginning. Of my established favourites: Greg Egan made a welcome late return with "Border Guards," but despite his writing being head and shoulders above the majority, the story was not his most impressive; Paul McAuley, on the other hand, tantalized with "Alien TV," then deliv-

ered with the very contemporary and millenarial "Before the Flood."

I have one more story to mention in my list of highlights, and that is Paul Park's "Bukavu Dreams." I used to work for a charity involved in East Africa (during the Rwanda crisis in 1994), and this story impacted on me personally. However, I suspect that even if I had not had this individual connection, this nuanced, emotionally mature and tightly written piece would still have had a powerful effect.

Before I get on to the few stories that really irritated me, you may be wondering why I have not mentioned any of the authors to whom *IZ* gave most space. Tanith Lee and Richard Calder both write slightly overwrought fantasy. I find both read well, but are not in any way demanding. They're just not my cup of tea. On Kim Newman and Brian Stableford — I know the editor of *IZ* loves his pulp, but there is only so far you can go in eating British popular fiction's past, and consuming characters, tropes and stylistic tics until there is nothing of substance left. Darrell Schweitzer and Don Webb seem to perform a similar archaeological service: fairy tales, ghost stories, Lovecraftian pastiche — you name it, they can do it. I am not complaining to any extreme extent — such undemanding fluff pads out *IZ* nicely, and, like a comfortable old pair of socks, you always know what you will be getting with these authors. However within a few minutes of reading them, their stories are gone. Nothing memorable, nothing challenging.

Now the stories I didn't like. I do not understand why you gave so much prominence to Alastair Reynolds's "Galactic North." Reynolds has never really done much for me, and this cut-price cosmic love story (of sorts) came on all Attanasio (in *Last Legends of Earth* mode rather than his recent Arthurian tack) or Egan à la *Diaspora*, only to leave a hollow, unsatisfactory feeling of a wasted half-hour reading it; most disappointing. All my other choices come from the Australian issue. Sean McMullen's "New Words of Power" was quite the most heavy-handed, juvenile and sub-Pratchett attempt at humorous fantasy that I have seen. Admittedly, this is not my favourite sub-genre. Terry Dowling's "The View in Nancy's Window," immediately following, left me wondering why he has ever managed to gain so high a reputation in the sf world; "insipid" is the best polite word I can use to describe it. Most of the other stories in this issue were poor (with the exception of Ivan Jurisevic's already noted), and the whole issue, with its second-hand cover, cloying editorial by the usually good Paul Brazier (my family lives in Australia too, but you won't catch me printing photos of them to

illustrate my opinions about the place), and lacklustre reviews, was the nadir of *IZ*'s year. July to September in general were a disappointment when compared with the previous three months. Luckily there was a general recovery towards the end of the year.

The weird thing was, there were plenty of good stories by Australian writers in *IZ* this year, it was just that almost none of them featured in the Australian issue! This was perhaps the big problem – the stories judged to be most “Australian,” and therefore in the “special” issue, seemed to be simply those playing with stereotypes and recognizable (to the outsider) Australian themes. Those of most literary or provocative merit were more universal. Perhaps this says something about the whole enterprise, or perhaps it is just an unfortunate accident. In either case I would ask you to think a lot more carefully before stepping onto the stony path between nationality and fiction again.

P.S. Please do an interview with Ian McDonald when the final volume of his masterful “Chaga-Kirinya” sequence comes out. He is easily the most talented (and underrated) of our sf authors, and manages to write beautifully and create memorable characters while getting serious political points across – an all too unusual combination.

David Wood

Chopwell, Tyne & Wear

Editor: *An interview with Ian McDonald should be coming up in the fairly near future, we hope. We note your criticisms of last year's all-Australian issue with interest, and shall take them into account in planning any future special issues. However, it should be noted that many other readers disagreed with you in your particular judgments of the Australian stories.*

Dear Editors:

The Gary Westfahl article “A Christmas Caviar, or, It's a Wonderful Life” caught my eye in *Interzone* 151. I thought this was, for the most part, an insightful and intelligent deconstruction of Dickens's story, *A Christmas Carol* and Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* – two of my favourites. At the end of his article though, I think he *spectacularly* misses the point of the film's final scene.

I would suggest that the “growing pile of money” he refers to is only a metaphor for the real cause of George Bailey's happiness, i.e., the manifestation of his family and friends' visible support and concern. I don't think it has anything to do with material wealth whatsoever. I believe this idea is reinforced by his brother's toast, “...to the richest man in town,” an obvious reference to his family and friends, and

not to the amount of money he has.

Also, to suggest that Potter is only temporarily thwarted totally misses the point also. (And even if this was correct, the temporary defeat of evil would be true to the film's bleak feel). What really happens at the end of the film is that George Bailey's lone struggle to keep the Building & Loan going finally becomes a group struggle that the community rallies together to meet; something that would have had a greater emotional and intellectual resonance to post-War audiences. The idea about any continuing threat from Potter is also negated by the offer of a 25,000-dollar line of credit in the telegram from Sam Mainwaring. Something I presume would have been available from then on.

Potter has been seen off for good. He may not have been transformed, but the community has. I'd call that a argument for the Xmas spirit, if such a thing exists rather than a “thinly veiled argument against.” Wouldn't you?

Paul Fraser

Aberdeen

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Dear Editors:

A recent edition of *IZ* commented that Arthur C. Clarke's novel *Childhood's End* remains a favourite and a sf classic. I am now in the midst of reading it having picked it up in a second-hand bookstore. On page 122 of my Pan paperback edition the following commentary occurs:

“The world's now placid, featureless and culturally dead; nothing really new has been created since the Overlords [seemingly benign but omnipotent aliens] came. The reason's obvious. There's nothing left to struggle for and there are too many distractions and entertainments... Did you know the average viewing time per person is now three hours a day?”

Looks like many of us have already got there without the need for “Overlords” – or perhaps they have been substituted by Sony PlayStation etc.

Derek Grubb

Australind, Australia

Dear Editors:

I don't especially want to tackle Chris Gilmore about his review of my book *The Other Side of the Mirror* (Citron Press) in the March *Interzone*. Suffice to say I think his opinions are based on a misreading of the collection.

However I must set the record straight on the issue of previous publication. Gilmore states that for the stories “there are no magazine appearances acknowledged.” True, there have been no *paper* magazine appearances. But false, when it comes to previous exposure and Citron Press's acknowledgement of the fact.

“The Re-Possessed” (mentioned in his review) previously appeared on the Internet in *Time Out Net Books* edited by Nick Royle, 1997. “Sybilmeet and Retreat” previously appeared in Chris Kenworthy's paperback anthology *Sugar Sleep* (1993). The stories “My Elongated Scar” and “The House of the Broken Pediment” were broadcast on Radio 3 (1987-88). All this information can be found opposite the title page of *The Other Side of the Mirror*.

I've therefore not in Gilmore's words “failed to place them or chosen to disregard the market.” He acknowledges that I have my “own vision to impart.” Certainly. But not before I first tried out some stories in different media. I carefully honed down that fiction, along with the other stories, over several years, to impart that “vision.”

“...but to begin by seeking book publication may not have been the best approach.” So concludes Gilmore's review.

Not guilty. The best, most sensible approach, is what I did.

Alan David Price

London

Dear Editors:

There was a query raised in *IZ* 151 (p65) about the demise of the line of *Star Wars* fiction from West End Games. WEG has lost its licence for *Star Wars* (they produced the *Star Wars* role-playing game for many years). The licence has gone to TSR (the original *Dungeons & Dragons* company), which is owned by Wizards of the Coast (the *Magic: The Gathering* company), which in turn was bought by Hasbro last year.

West End Games's loss of *Star Wars* may or may not have anything to do with the company hitting severe cash-flow problems a year or so ago.

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John Sladek 1937–2000

We note with deep sorrow the recent death of John Sladek. An American author who lived for 18 years in Britain, he was a good friend to this magazine in its early years, appearing in our debut number (Spring 1982) and in several subsequent issues. John was a quiet, gentle person who, in print, became one of sf's most savage satirists. He remains underrated, but a major British publisher has recently contracted to reissue several of his best novels. Let us hope that a new generation of readers discovers them and takes delight in them.



"Behold ye among the heathen and regard and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe, though it be told you."

– Habakkuk, Chapter 1, verse 5

Cameron had been warned about the smell, and had steeled himself before entering the cabin, but it wasn't as bad as he'd been led to believe. It was a queer aroma, right enough, not too strong, but when you got a whiff it was far worse than any old unwashed body. More like a well-hung, well-matured mix of odours from sweaty feet through to unwashed clothes, combined with diesel fumes, oil, cabbage water and perfume.

Harnack would have smelt even worse had he not spent ten or fifteen minutes in the water.

"Good morning, *Herr Kapitänleutnant*. No, please don't stand up. You speak any English?" said Cameron, who was fluent in German, but wasn't about to let on.

Herr Kapitänleutnant Harnack stood up anyway. "Ein Bisschen, Herr...?"

"Cameron. Major Robert Lyon Cameron at your service. Cigarette?"

"Thank you very much. I see from your – how do we say? – Badge? The badge on your cap indicates that you are not a sailor. You are an artillery officer?"

The *Kapitänleutnant* took a cigarette from Cameron's

proffered packet. "Please..." he said, gesturing that Cameron should sit himself at the table.

Cameron had seen to it that there would be two chairs and a table in the German's cabin. Always better to interview a fellow on what he feels is his home ground.

The *Kapitänleutnant* had been found a chess-board which was now on the table in mid-game. Perhaps he was playing with one of his comrades, or perhaps with himself.

Cameron sat down, carefully arranging the manila folder in front of him. He took a cigarette for himself and fumbled around in his battledress for matches. For this occasion he had decided to wear second-best. At breakfast he had even considered staining it with a little fried egg-yolk, but decided that that would have been overdoing it. Besides, you didn't get fresh eggs that often and he preferred to eat the lot, then clean every last speck from his plate with his bread.

Finally he found a box of Vestas, struck one and lit the German's fag before his own. He pushed the cigarette packet across the table to him with a "keep them" gesture to which the German responded with a dignified-but-grateful nod.

"Yes, I'm a gunner. You have no idea how much I detest being at sea. Mind you, it's really not too bad aboard this leviathan. I came out on a corvette. Horrible little thing that tossed itself all over the ocean like a lovesick hip-

HMS Habakkuk

Eugene Byrne



Illustrations by Dominic Harman

popotamus. I spent five days wishing I could just die." Cameron pulled theatrically on the waistband of his trousers and added, "I reckon I've lost a stone in weight. When this show's over I'm not so much as getting on the ferry to Calais ever again."

Assuming we're allowed to visit Calais if the Ivans get there first.

The U-Boat commander half-smiled, then pulled deeply on his cigarette. As he exhaled all you could make out of his face was his thick beard and his oil-stained peaked cap which had somehow survived ten or fifteen minutes in the water.

Cameron took a deep drag on his own cigarette. "Ahhhh! First of the day! Best fag of the lot, I always say."

The cabin was too big, about fifteen feet square. Submariners were used to confined spaces and he worried that the *Kapitänleutnant* might get agoraphobic in here. He had a bed, wash-stand, table and chairs, a case with a few battered novels in (all in English, of course) and a couple of framed prints of hunting scenes on the walls. Like all of the living quarters, the walls were lined with plywood, behind which was rockwool, and then the pykrete. Chances were that Harnack was curious, and would have had a poke behind the wainscoting.

There were few portholes in the ship because the hull was so thick, but the room was reasonably well-lit by a bare

bulb that dangled from the ceiling half a mile or so up among all the hissing and clanking pipes they always have on ships. Lack of daylight wouldn't bother a submariner.

Also, Herr Kapitänleutnant Bruno Harnack... Black-haired, blue-eyed and the fight isn't gone out of you yet. No, this bugger won't give much away.

Sailors the world over referred to their captains as "the old man." In this case, *der Alte* was 28 years old. According to the CV the Admiralty had sent Cameron this morning, Harnack had been born in Bremen, February 1916, son of a sailor, grandson of a haberdasher, studied engineering somewhere-or-other, joined in '38, trained at Kiel-Mürwik. Two older brothers, both in the Kriegsmarine, both in the U-Boat service, one MPK, one still alive (as far as we know). Last command the U-474, a Type IXC sailing out of Lorient. Forced to the surface by aircraft dropping depth-charges and sunk with the loss of six of her crew of 60 the day before yesterday. The captain and all the others took to rafts or the water and were picked up by a destroyer that had reached the scene less than half an hour later.

Harnack's score was 35,000 tons. Not bad.

Not known to be a party member, it said in the file. We don't think Harnack's a Nazi. He's one of the good Germans.

Thirty-five thousand tons. Seven merchantmen sent to the bottom. God knows how many men drowned or

roasted to death by burning oil and petrol. Men set adrift in open boats in Atlantic gales to die of exposure or thirst or starvation or madness.

Or perhaps you rescued them all, Fritz? I doubt it.

Cameron found himself shocked by the strength of his feelings. He'd been dealing with German PoWs and deserters since coming back from Dunkirk with a gammy leg four years ago, but this was his first U-Boat and he found something particularly disgusting about their mode of warfare.

You won't get much out of this bastard, but you can soften him up anyway.

Harnack's crew would do the rest. They'd give up a few interesting morsels in due course. If not to Cameron, then to the microphones hidden around the PoWs' accommodation while the prisoners were up on deck getting some fresh air. The Sparks and his men had complained bitterly; the Jerry cabins stank, they said. Despite getting a good bath in the North Atlantic, they'd all been hauled out smelling just as vile as Harnack. It was the perfume that was the queerest thing. After a few weeks at sea all U-Boat crews smelt disgusting and so doused themselves in Cologne.

Cameron couldn't begin to imagine Jolly Jack Tar using toilet water. British submarines must be hell compared to the U-Boats' mere purgatory.

"Now then, to business, ha-ha! You'll have to forgive me as I've never done this sort of thing before." Cameron opened his folder. In it was a single blank sheet. He fished his fountain-pen from his breast pocket and unscrewed the cap.

The dangerous part... "I understand that Lieutenant-Commander Forbes has already spoken to you and your men..."

Harnack nodded and stated formally. "We gave him our names, ranks and service numbers, *Herr Major*."

Forbes had done a good job yesterday. Cameron had listened in as he did it. Exactly the right degree of officious formality and hostility. Forbes had made it clear that he'd prefer to haul them all into the drink, singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" as he did so.

"Splendid, splendid. Now, I have been assigned to look after your welfare for the next few days. As you can imagine, I'm rather surplus to requirement here while all the sailors are jolly busy..."

He let it hang in the air for a moment, inviting some sort of response from Harnack. Nothing.

"Ahhh, good, then," said Cameron awkwardly. "Now, are you satisfied with the way in which you and your men are being treated?"

Harnack held his hand to his ear.

Cameron had sort of mumbled the question as part of his idiot act, but he'd not said it that quietly. "Are you and your men being treated well?" he said clearly.

Harnack nodded fairly emphatically. Blast him. The interesting ones could be treated like royalty but would always find something to complain about. When he saw the chessboard, Cameron had half-hoped that Harnack would be one of them, a jumped-up little Jerry who would try all in his power to remind you who was the Master

Race. They were always more fun, and quite often more productive in the long run.

There was a knock on the door. Harnack said nothing. This was his cabin, and it was important to make him feel as though he owned it. Cameron couldn't open it.

There was another knock. This time much louder. "Komm!" said Harnack. "Enter, please."

A steward came in bearing a tray with two mugs of coffee and two glasses of rum.

"The Lieutenant-Commander sends his compliments, Sir," said the sailor, addressing Cameron. "He thought that you and the Jerr... er, German, captain would like some coffee and a tot."

The man laid the tray on the table, saluted and left.

Real coffee! This was one of the advantages of being this far out. Most of the supply-ships came from Halifax, Nova Scotia, laden with goodies the Canucks and Yanks took for granted, but which were luxuries in Europe.

Come on Harnack. Be impressed. I double-dare you! You and me both know perfectly well that Germans don't have proper coffee any more and drink stuff made of acorns.

Harnack almost snatched his mug from the tray. The smell of the coffee almost overwhelmed the room, drowning the stench of body, diesel and Cologne.

Cameron took his rum and poured it into the coffee. The German took his glass, sniffed at it suspiciously, smiled a little and held it up. Cameron touched his mug to it.

"Cheers."

"Your good health, *Herr Major*."

They drank.

"So may I report to the Captain that you and your crew are completely satisfied with the rations, the accommodation and so forth? No complaints at all?"

"*Nein, Herr Major*. This is a most luxurious ship. And a very interesting one."

"Isn't she just, though?" Cameron meant it. "I'm not sure I'd call her a ship. She's a moving island. Ever seen an aircraft carrier close up before? I saw one in Pompey, erm, I mean Portsmouth, a couple of years back. I'm not joking when I tell you that this tub is five times the size of that one."

Harnack's eyes widened a little. "Surely it would break up?"

"Would if it was made in the usual way, old man," said Cameron. "But she ain't." He tapped the side of his nose.

Hesitate. Look a little guilty. "Listen, I'll tell you what. This boat's all very hush-hush, you know, but since the War's good and over for you, I imagine there's no harm in giving you a guided tour. But not today. I'll have to get permission from the Captain first."

Harnack pursed his lips and nodded eagerly. "I would very much be interested, *Herr Major*. Tell me, were the aircraft that sank my boat flying from this ship?"

"Oh yes. I think they threw a whole squadron of Mosquitos at you, didn't they?"

"Very interesting aircraft. I was told they are manufactured from wood." Then, slowly and deliberately, "a most ingenious use of materials."

Not half as ingenious as the material used to make this ship, but you've worked that out already for yourself,

haven't you, you clever bugger?

We're going to win the War, see? Your nasty little Corporal and his thugs are going to get strung up on an old English oak tree, don't you know? And when we've done that we will show considerably more mercy to you than you did to those poor merchant sailors and send you back home, although home will be nothing but a heap of smouldering rubble overrun by the Red Army and full of widows and orphans. Let's see how you like that.

Oh for Pete's sake, Cameron, stop acting as if he's the first Jerry you've ever met!

Harnack stubbed out his cigarette on the tin ashtray on the table between them and immediately took another from the packet. *Toujours la politesse*. Cameron passed him his box of matches. "Keep 'em," he smiled.

"No, I don't mind telling you it's a relief to be on this thing. I'm told that you hardly notice the weather out there unless it's blowing a gale. Not that I'm in any hurry to find out. We got caught in a gale in that little corvette."

"This was a flower class ship, yes?"

"Ship? More the size of a rowing-boat, old man. The First Lieutenant on it told me that they joke that a corvette would roll on a blade of wet grass. But I suppose you'd know all about them."

Harnack shrugged.

Cameron let the silence hang as long as he dared.

Come on then, Heinie, tell me a story. Tell me about your last encounter with His Majesty's Navy. Or even just tell me you've never seen a corvette or a destroyer. Tell me anything at all, God rot you.

No? Oh well. Never mind.

"So tell me please. Why am I being interrogated by an army officer? This is not at all what I was expecting."

Cameron winced theatrically. "Interrogated? I hope you don't think it's that, old chap. Look here, I'll give you a small tip if you're planning on spending the next few months improving your English. We don't like that word 'interrogate.' It has overtones of dungeons and coshes and secret police. I'm not here to interrogate you. I'm just seeing you're all okay because everyone else on this boat's rather busy."

"I am sorry. I meant no offence."

Cameron smiled and waved his hand. "Oh, none taken, my dear fellow. I'm not at all offended. And I do owe you an explanation. You see, I was bound for America to learn about some hush-hush new piece of artillery but my corvette got called back. So they dropped me off here. Said I can wait for the next supply ship. I was stooging around in the wardroom reading an execrable cowboy novel when one of the officers told me they were a little short-handed. So I offered to take charge of the PoWs' welfare."

Look him in the eye when you say it. That's the way. He's looking quite hard back. But the rum has loosened you up a little. That's the spirit, Fritz. The War's over for you. Nothing you can do about it. You've done your duty to Adolf and the Fatherland, now take it easy. You've got it right cushy from now on.

"Are my crew and I your only prisoners, Herr Major?"

"Please, call me Bob... Ah, yes, you chaps are our only prisoners at the moment."

"And you must call me Otto. And how many German submarines have been destroyed by this ship and its aircraft? Or are you forbidden to tell me that?"

"Well, it is a secret, but I suppose there's no harm in telling you now. This ship has been on station for ten days now and has so far sunk two U-Boats definitely – one of them being yours, of course – with another probable. She never surfaced, and an unconvincingly small amount of debris came up, so there's a question-mark as to whether she actually sank or whether she vented a load of oil and blew the week's laundry out of the torpedo-tubes."

"And the crew of the other boat? Were any of them rescued?"

"Oh yes. All of them, I believe." Cameron lied. Another U-Boat had been killed a week ago, but she had broken up and sank after coming to the surface. When one of the destroyer screen had reached the scene none of her men were left alive. "Not only that, but we managed to take the boat whole. My understanding is that her captain set demolition-charges on her after she was forced to surface, but for some reason they failed to go off."

"The submarine was captured?"

"Oh yes. Our destroyer got a line onto her and put a few men aboard. Brave chaps. They towed her all the way back to Nova Scotia. I imagine our technical chaps will want to get a good look at her. Now, you'll be pleased to know that I've arranged for you and your men to get a shower and a change of clothes later this afternoon. If you want it, that is..."

What I'm saying here, Fritz, is that the game's up. We want you to think we know all about your new gadgets. Now be a good little Hun and give me a foothold, why don't you?

Harnack's face betrayed nothing. "The crew of the other U-Boat are here on this ship?"

"No. A supply ship dropped by a few days back." He pointed to his half-finished mug of coffee and smiled. "They were taken off to a camp in Canada. I understand we get all our supplies from North America out here. Do you know I had a banana last night? Now when did I last have a banana? Thirty-nine, I suppose. Five years ago. They really do have it nice and cushy out here."

"I'm sorry? What is 'cushy'?"

"Comfortable. Positively luxurious, really. I mean compared with back home. Not that things are too bad, but you know how everything's rationed. I imagine things are similar in Germany."

Harnack half-smiled and shrugged again. That bloody shrug! He must have learned it in France. I bet you've got a darling little French popsie tucked away in a flat in Lorient, haven't you? She's the one who taught you the Gallic shrug, I'll bet.

"Yes, thank you Bob. I would very much like a shower and some clean clothes and I am sure my men would like it as well."

"Must be pretty uncomfortable, that. Being in a submarine for months on end, I mean..."

Harnack nodded slightly.

There was no sense in pushing it any further. Cameron might give him the guided tour tomorrow or the day

after, but he doubted that would be too much use. Never mind. There were 43 more Jerries in the hold.

An enormous ship like this might well have some sort of printing facilities on it. He could make up a form or something for the U-Boat crewmen to fill in. Servicemen the world over – not just Germans – understood bumf and bureaucracy. That might be productive.

Just one other little thing. “Well, I must toddle along,” he said, standing up. “Have you seen your men today?” he asked, deliberately facing away from Harnack and towards the door.

“I beg your pardon?”

Harnack was definitely a little deaf. “Yes, thank you.”

“Now you appreciate that we have to keep you all under guard, but if you need to see me about anything, anything at all, just bang on your door. The chaps outside will get word to me.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.” Cameron picked up his folder and held out his hand.

Harnack shook it firmly.

Cameron made for the door.

“Herr Major, ah, Bob?”

“Yes, old chap?”

“I have told my men several times that they are not to discuss anything concerning the U-Boat service while they are aboard this ship. I have told them that there may be hidden microphones in their quarters and that under no circumstances to speak about our cruise, about other U-Boats or about any new equipment that we or other boats might have. I want you please to understand that this is our duty to our country and that I have every faith that they will tell you nothing of any use. Please do not be too hard on them.”

You’re a piece of work, Harnack, you really are.

“I’m sorry, Otto, but you really have got me all wrong. I’m just passing through here. Intelligence never was my strong point.”

“Jawohl, Herr Major.”

Cameron had been interrogating PoWs long enough to recognize the German for irony.

A knock at the door, then, “Are you decent, Bob?”

Cameron was in trousers and vest and shaving. His cabin even boasted a sink with running hot and cold water and a small mirror.

“Come in!”

Lieutenant-Commander Charles Forbes stepped in. Forbes was the ship’s chief gunnery officer and as such was under-employed which was why, he said, he had been assigned to look after Cameron.

“So, what luck yesterday, then?”

“Not much, I’m afraid. Thanks for sending your chap with the coffee and rum. He got his lines word-perfect. Smart man.”

“That’ll be young Burrows. He’s wasted on this tub, really.”

“How so?”

“We’ve a complement of 3,250 men,” said Forbes. “but only around twenty per cent of them actually need to be

competent. The aircrew and the people servicing the planes, a few others, and that’s all.”

Cameron wiped the remaining flecks of shaving-foam from his chin and looked at Forbes. The man was tall and thin. His adam’s apple was his most prominent feature, though he looked the part in his smart uniform and cap covered in scrambled egg.

“I wouldn’t let the Captain hear you say that if I were you.”

Forbes sniggered. “Definitely not. Proper navy is the Old Man. He’d rather be commanding a battle-wagon, chasing after the *Tirpitz*, that sort of thing. A lot of us feel the same; it’s just not cricket, this life of luxury aboard a ship that’s practically unsinkable. So last night, the Old Man decreed that we’re to cut down on the coffee and bananas and fresh eggs and so forth. We’re only to be allowed such luxuries on special occasions. And I’ve not heard anyone grumbling.”

“That’s it! I’m not staying in your hotel another day. I’m going home now.”

Forbes laughed. “I managed to turn the situation to your advantage.”

“How so?” said Cameron, picking up the freshly-laundered shirt that had been laid out on his bed and pulling it on.

“Like so,” said Forbes, producing a huge pair of binoculars from behind his back with a flourish. “A present from the Navy.”

Cameron took them from Forbes’ outstretched hand. They were big and heavy, the black paint chipped away in places, and the leather strap was watermarked by sea-salt, but they were of very good quality.

“Zeiss,” said Forbes. “The best. They’ve a dozen on every U-Boat. The lookouts use them when they’re running on the surface, but keep spares for heavy weather and always have a man below to take the wet ones, clean the salt water off them, dry them, and pass a fresh pair up to the tower. One of Harnack’s officers had these around his neck when he had to dive into the drink and forgot to rid himself of them. It happens. When they were picked up, one of the officers on the destroyer liberated them. There isn’t a single officer in the Navy wouldn’t trade both grandmothers for these.”

“But he’d swap them for a crate of bananas?”

“Got it in one, old man. Didn’t cost me a penny personally, so it’s only fair that they go back into the war effort. They might help you curry favour with the man who lost ’em. He’s the *Wachtoffizier*, the executive officer, Harnack’s Number One. Chap by the name of Kremer.”

“Thanks very much. They may well be very useful to Kremer.” As a PoW, Kremer would have no use for his glasses, but he’d soon find that he could barter them with a British sailor for fabulous luxuries like cigarettes and toothpaste. Yes, these might well put Cameron in a very good light with him, without appearing to be outright bribery.

“Come on then, let’s get some breakfast before my brother officers pinch everything.”

“After you.”

Cameron pulled on his jacket and they left the room.

He took the binoculars with him, intending to go on deck later to play with them. Not that there'd be much to see, apart from aircraft-carrier and sea.

They emerged into a very long, very broad corridor. Much of this level, below the hangar-deck and about level with the waterline, was given over to accommodation and crews' facilities, including messes, a cinema and an enormous gymnasium. The magazines and refrigeration plants were much further down. There was no engine-room as such.

"Too bad you were quartered so far from the ward-room," said Forbes, returning the salutes of a gaggle of passing sailors.

"It's good exercise," said Cameron. "You get tired of driving a desk all day." He decided to set himself a brisk pace, though the piece of Jerry shrapnel he'd got in his leg in France and which had disqualified him from active service meant it wasn't all that brisk. He'd only given up his walking-stick a few months ago.

"Surely your life is a little more active than that?"

Cameron supposed it was. Last year he had been in Italy on psy-ops, trying to persuade Germans to desert. "The fittest people on this ship in six months' time will be those Jerry sailors, you know."

"How's that, Bob?"

There was a faint rumble behind them. Cameron turned. Coming up slowly behind them was one of the small yellow-painted tractors that were used on deck to tow aircraft. The tractor was pulling half a dozen trollies, some empty, some loaded with cans and boxes. They moved to one side to make way for it. The man driving said, "thank you, sirs."

"I was in Italy a while back. Germans were deserting to us and we wanted more. We were dropping leaflets on them all the time. You know the sort of thing; you've lost the war, so let's stop the killing now. Or, if you survive this lot, you'll only get sent to the Russian Front and die of cold or get your throat slit by some Russian woman while you sleep, so better to give yourself up here where it's nice and sunny. Or, those Frenchies who've been conscripted to work in German factories are seducing your wives and girlfriends. We've always tried to tell the truth where we can.

"So someone had the bright idea of making up some leaflets with a photograph of German PoWs living the life of Riley. Perfectly honest picture of some happy Jerries sitting outside their cabin in British Columbia after a nice healthy day's logging. Some are in armchairs, one's patting a shaggy dog, some are reading books and others are listening to the gramophone. Very nice. We dropped these things all along the line for a fortnight and didn't get a single deserter. The rate dropped from a few dozen a week to nothing. Not a nibble."

The tractor disappeared ahead of them though a huge set of double-doors. As the last of its carriage disappeared,

Cameron noticed that one of the cardboard boxes on it was labelled POWDERED EGG. *Oh please, Mr Captain, Sir, let me have one more proper egg!*

Forbes said, "The Jerries thought it was lies? The picture looked too good to be true?"

"Exactly. They have no trouble believing that their sweethearts are being romanced by slave-workers, or that they'll freeze to death in Russia if they survive Italy, but they can't possibly credit it that they might end up somewhere rather pleasant. So we did another leaflet, this time with a picture of Jerries standing behind barbed wire looking bored but reasonably well-nourished, and our usual flow of deserters resumed. Even now, your average German, soldier or civilian, has life

a lot easier than your average Russian. But in their own minds, the Germans are already defeated while the Russians know now that no matter how hard the going is, they cannot lose."

"The historic and inevitable triumph of the proletariat," quipped Forbes. They both laughed.

Forbes was remarkably well-read and well-informed for a Navy man. Most officers, even wartime ones, were philistines at heart. Not so Charles Forbes, who had actually been to Cambridge.

There was a shout from behind them and the deck vibrated slightly. Hundreds of huge men in shorts and singlets were jog-trotting towards them, led by a sergeant (he wore no insignia, but he could only be a sergeant) who occasionally turned to face them, jogging backwards and shouting colourful military abuse.



The men came closer, in perfect five-abreast formation, pounding the rock-solid deck beneath them. All looked to be in peak physical condition, not one less than six feet tall. Some of them had shaved their heads completely, while others maintained a narrow tuft of hair running from front to back, in the style of Red Indians. Many of them *were* Red Indians.

Cameron and Forbes stood to one side to let the men thunder past.

"I don't know what the enemy will make of them..." shouted Cameron.

"...but by God they frighten me!" said Forbes, completing the Duke of Wellington's quip.

They were Canadian commandos being accommodated in the plentiful space that the ship had to offer while awaiting transport to Europe, probably Italy now that the French invasion had been deferred. These men were so precious, so well-trained, so skilled in the merciless application of violence, that they could not be entrusted to a regular troopship. So they were here waiting for a hospital ship to come and pick them up. By the Geneva Convention, which the Germans tended to observe, hospital ships were not supposed to be fired on.

"I have a question, Bob. It's not in terribly good taste, and you can tell me to mind my own bloody business if you wish, but I'm curious... Why give your Jerries the soft-soap? Surely you could find out whatever you're trying to find out a lot faster with more direct methods? A couple of those chaps..." he pointed to the Canadians, already almost out of sight along the vast corridor – "ought to squeeze it out of them in no time."

"It's not a crass question at all, Charles. We've all seen enough of this war that we don't give a damn how we finish it. If I thought it'd do any good, I'd happily go in with the brass-knuckles. But you get better information and co-operation if it's volunteered. We've achieved some amazing successes through cunning and sweet reason. The only thing you can persuade a man of by beating him up is that you're a bastard."

They reached the senior officers' wardroom. There were wardrooms for junior officers and for the Fleet Air Arm officers as well. In all HMS *Habakkuk* had a complement of over 400 officers.

There was simply no comparison between this vast, luxurious space and the cramped broom-cupboard which had served as the officers' quarters back on the corvette. There were shelves of books, several dozen easy chairs, tables of all shapes and sizes, from four huge dining-tables which could accommodate 25 diners at a time, through to coffee tables, card tables and God-wot else. It was all rather jolly, like the drawing-room of a big country house at the end of a crowded weekend party.

By tradition, the wardroom on a ship also served as a working-space, and at one of the big tables, several engineer officers sat poring over charts and diagrams, holding a quiet but intense discussion.

Several of the men greeted Forbes with cries of "Morning, Guns!" and nodded cheerfully in Cameron's direction. Not all were Naval officers, Cameron noticed. There were a couple of other Army uniforms, a couple of RAFs and,

at one table, a small knot of US Navy officers, all of them presumably along with various good reasons for wanting to see this remarkable ship in action. Scattered around the room were quite a few men in with the wavy cuff-bands of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The RNVR, or "wavy navy" had borne the brunt of convoy duties and anti-submarine warfare in the last few years and many were here now either to learn, or to impart their experience, or both.

They found a small, empty table close to the hatch where an immaculately-dressed steward was dispensing coffee and plates of food.

"I'll get 'em," said Forbes. "What do you want?"

"Everything that's on offer," said Cameron. "I'm famished."

Everything on offer turned out to be three small sausages that tasted suspiciously of bread and several slices of hot toast with margarine and runny, sour-tasting marmalade. The coffee was good, though.

Lieutenant Evans, the senior radio officer, came over to them as they were lighting cigarettes.

"Morning, Sparks!" said Forbes. "Do join us."

"Thanks," said Evans, a small blond baby-faced man who probably wasn't yet 25. "But I've already eaten. I just wanted a quick word with Major Cameron."

"Fine," said Forbes, standing up. "I must be getting along anyway..."

"No, please," said Cameron. "Whatever Lieutenant Evans has to tell me might affect you as well, Charles. You've both been extremely helpful so far and there's no reason why we can't work together."

Forbes nodded and sat, motioning towards the steward to bring more coffee and a cup for Evans.

"So what have you got for me, Sparks?"

"Nothing much, but one rather interesting development," said Evans as he sat down and accepted one of Cameron's cigarettes. "We've been listening to the microphones in the prisoners' quarters as you asked, and yesterday I had my two best German speakers standing guard and eavesdropping while the Jerries had a wash. Now we couldn't take notes while they were in the showers, but I've had stenographers making notes of everything that was said in their quarters. Obviously, you're the best judge of it, but we don't think any of them has said anything at all useful."

"Bad show," said Forbes.

"There is something, though," said Evans. "They speak to one another in very loud voices. As though some of them are hard of hearing. But it's not really noisy anywhere on this ship except on the flight and hangar decks."

"The MO didn't mention anything about that when he looked 'em over the day before yesterday," said Forbes. "But then he wouldn't have been giving them a hearing-test, would he?"

"Let's get the Medical Officer to take another look at them," said Cameron. "Though I'm pretty certain I already know what this is about."

Forbes and Evans looked at him expectantly, neither wanting to be the first to prompt him to divulge his secret. "Look, as you've both probably guessed, I'm here

on an intelligence matter. I'm not Navy, but the Admiralty couldn't spare any of their other people, so they're borrowed me because of my experience with PoWs and because I'm a gunner I'm supposed to be technically-minded. There's been all sorts of talk recently about new weapons and gadgets being fitted to U-Boats and I'm here to see what can be found out. Their Lordships reckon that *Habakkuk* affords me the best frontline view because it'll sink dozens of the swine."

Forbes and Evans nodded. *Habakkuk* would send loads of Jerries to the bottom, with virtually no chance that she would be sunk herself. Nobody ever used the word "unsinkable" of course. Every ship could potentially sink, though in *Habakkuk*'s case it was extremely unlikely, even if the *Scharnhorst* came up alongside and fired point-blank.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't talk too much to your fellow officers about what I'm doing here. Not just for security reasons, but because I don't want everyone thinking I can answer all sorts of questions. It'd only make me unpopular," he smiled. "I believe that some of those Jerries are deaf because their submarine was fitted with a snorkel."

"A what?"

"Snorkel. *Schnorchel* in German. Big breathing-tube, basically. Not only so's the crew can breathe fresh air underwater, but also because it allows the U-Boat to run underwater on its Diesel engines."

"Bastards," muttered Evans. Cameron gathered that despite Evans' tender years he had been in the service since September 1939 and had sailed on dozens of convoys. He must have witnessed some appalling things, including the loss of his own ship, a hunt class destroyer, with around half her crew. The war had been personal for him for quite some time.

"Meaning," said Forbes, thinking aloud, "that they can travel slightly faster underwater, they don't need to expose themselves on the surface, they can keep their electric motors recharged all the time, and that their exposure to radar and huff-duff is greatly reduced."

"By an estimated fifty percent," agreed Cameron. "Instead of a conning tower the size of a motor launch running on the surface, all you get is a contraption about the size of a man's head."

"Cunning," said Forbes. "Why didn't they think of it sooner?"

"They did. But while Germany has far more brilliant scientists and technicians than we had until the Yanks joined the show, their war-effort has, until this chap Speer came along, been run by imbeciles. If you put me in a bomber over Berlin and I knew that Hitler, Goering,

Goebbels and Himmler were right underneath me, I would die rather than drop that bomb. They're the best Allies we have."

"Better than Roosevelt?" smiled Forbes.

"Better than de Gaulle, anyway," said Cameron. He and Forbes laughed. Evans looked uncomfortable with this mirth when matters of life and death were at stake.

"So why are they deaf?" asked Evans, impatiently.

"If I could find out for sure, I'd have a useful morsel to take to the Admiralty," said Cameron. "We've heard rumours from the cloak-and-dagger boys that Jerry sailors were coming home hard of hearing, but this is the first time we've seen it up close. My theory is that the snorkel doesn't always work properly. Something causes the air intake to go wrong, perhaps something as simple as a big wave hitting it. This then causes the engines to draw

air from inside the submarine itself which would lead to very sudden and dramatic changes in air-pressure. This would be very uncomfortable for the Jerries and could well end up bursting a few eardrums."

"Ugh!" Forbes shuddered.

"All that and the appalling stink of unwashed Jerry as well. Almost makes you feel sorry for the bastards."

Later, he would have the MO look them all over again (with Harnack's knowledge, of course; purely routine stuff, strict letter of the Geneva Convention, blah blah blah), then segregate out the deaf ones. Then he could cook up some cock-and-bull form for them to fill in for medical treatment or special rations, or something. Make sure each man filled his form in alone, and we might well get something out of it.

Somewhere up above them there were rumbling and humming noises. Aircraft taking off.

"Hmmm..." said Forbes after a few moments. "Sounds like it's time to go to work. We're trying something new today. I say, Bob, what are your plans?"

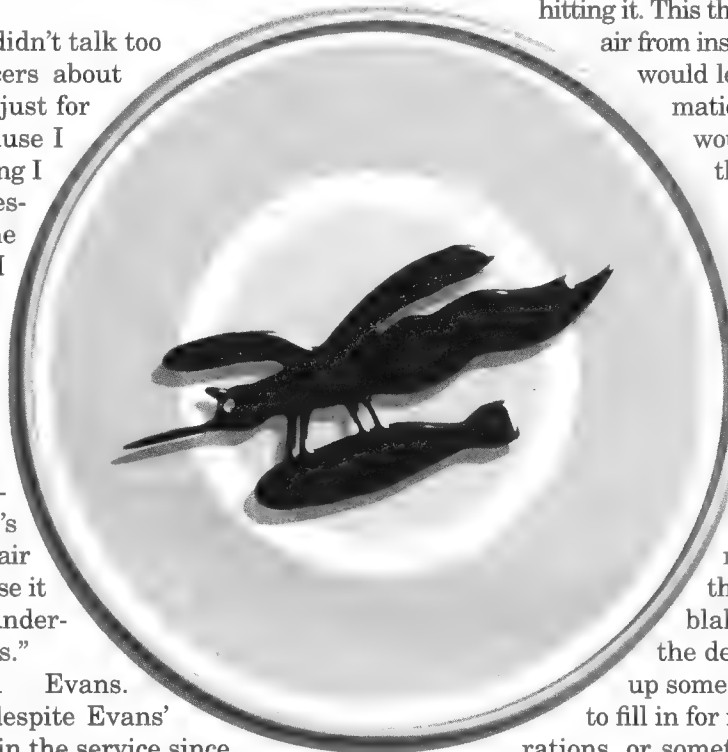
"I think I'll leave my Jerries be 'til later today, or perhaps even tomorrow."

"Why don't you want to interrogate them now?" asked Evans, slightly irritably. There was intelligence to be gathered, and the lives of his comrades might depend on it.

"Because I'm shooting them this line about being the bumbling dropshort turned amateur welfare officer. They mustn't get the idea that I'm too eager to chat to them. They'd only get suspicious."

Evans nodded. "Must be getting along. With any luck it'll be a busy day."

"I say, Bob," said Forbes. "If you're not busy, how would you like a grandstand view? I can't promise you'll see anything, but it'll be better than sitting around here?"



"I'd love it."

All around the ship, the bells sounded for action stations.

On HMS *Amaryllis*, the bridge had been a horrible, cold, wet open space exposed to the elements. Here on *Habakkuk*, it was an immense enclosed room which took up a whole floor of the island, the superstructure to the side of the flight-deck. Vast windows offered views of most of the grey-green horizon. The place hummed with quiet, efficient activity.

On a raised chair close to the front sat Captain T. C. R. Menzies-Graham, RN DSC and bar, an immense man in his 50s with a red-white beard who looked every bit the part.

Forbes had ushered Cameron in and quietly mentioned to the Captain who the guest was and what his business was here on the bridge. On any smaller ship, Cameron imagined, he would never have been allowed on the bridge at action stations. The captain had nodded towards him. A few moments later, Cameron heard him tell a young lieutenant named Summers to "look after the brown job, answer all his questions and see he doesn't get in the way."

Summers handed him a helmet and lifejacket. Everyone else on the bridge was wearing them already.

"Unlikely we'll need them, sir, but it's the captain's orders."

Fair enough, thought Cameron. These chaps have all been through too much, are too professional to not be listened to. He put on the helmet, pulling the strap under his chin, and allowed Summers to help him into the bulky cork lifebelt.

"So what's the news?" he asked Summers, who evidently didn't have too much to do either.

"Surface contact, sir. Radar chaps are pretty sure it's a U-Boat. It's fallen right into our trap," said Summers. "Admiralty reports between three and five U-Boats in our area, so we're inviting them to try and sink us. We've sent our escorts off over the horizon apart from the destroyer and frigate hugging our hull over to port."

Cameron looked. The two escort vessels were like toys bobbing up and down in the bath next to the massive 17-million ton bulk of *Habakkuk*.

"We're doing our best to look like a sitting duck. From the starboard side, anyway."

"How do we know that the Jerries will come from that direction?"

"We don't, sir. But it's a fifty-fifty chance. And we make a tempting target either way."

No U-Boat could resist the sight of an unprotected aircraft carrier. Any half-decent captain would risk making the attack in broad daylight on the surface. He'd count it a good bargain if he and his crew were lost so long as he took the Britisher with him.

"We have four squadrons of Mosquitoes armed with depth-charges up above," explained Summers, "And two squadrons of Sea-Typhoons with rockets. Half of them took off before daylight and the other half a short while ago. They're all stooging around above the cloud well out of earshot. As soon as we spot a Jerry we give the aircraft a position and bearing and they come tearing down. Hopefully, the Tiffies can get off a couple of missiles while

Fritz is still on the surface. The Mosquitoes arrive shortly afterwards with the D/Cs. Meanwhile, our escorts emerge from behind us to start a search-pattern."

"Assuming the U-Boat hasn't been destroyed already."

Summers nodded. He was looking at Cameron's German binoculars with evident envy. Cameron offered them to him to have a go.

Why do they say the sea is blue? It isn't out here. It's sort of grey-green, though it gets greener still, like watered-down Chartreuse, when it's washing over the deck of a corvette.

Thoughts of Chartreuse and corvettes made Cameron feel sick.

It was a cloudy but otherwise calm day. As calm as the Atlantic ever gets. This leviathan was pretty still, though. It'd want to be, with all the stuff – pykrete, they called it – that had gone into her construction.

"Lovely bins, Major," said Summers, handing the Zeiss glasses back. "If you ever want to sell them I have a couple of grandmothers you could have."

"I'll bear it in mind." Cameron took the binoculars and used them to admire the flight deck. There wasn't much activity going on. Aircraft were coming up and going down on the big lifts to the hangar-deck directly below where all the maintenance, fuelling and arming went on. Around the edges, men in steel helmets, flash-masks and duffel-coats stood by their guns. Forbes would be down there somewhere among them, he imagined. Apart from a couple of dozen dual-purpose 4.5 inch guns, all the other guns were essentially for anti-aircraft business – pom-poms, Bofors and machine-guns. They'd have precious little business out here, but if a U-Boat did get close then there was no sense in not throwing everything you had at it.

This really is a very tight ship, he thought, as he watched the men down below going about their business. All the men who had a job to do were doing it calmly and quickly, while those who didn't stood to their posts patiently. Nobody was loafing or smoking cigarettes.

"So what's your job, Lieutenant?"

"Refrigeration, sir. I'm second in command of keeping things cool. There's a refrigeration plant down below that pipes and conducts cold air and water all around."

"Hard work?"

"It is, sir. But we're learning an awful lot. If we build any more ships like this we'll do it a lot better next time."

"What's the biggest problem?"

"The flight deck. Most of our aircraft-carriers have decks made of steel, and that's what they wanted to use for this, but you get the problem of creep, that is to say that the metal would sink through the pykrete. Very slowly, I admit, but it would. So we have a wooden deck. This will sink as well, and you're going to get pykrete seeping up through the gaps. We'll have to replace the whole thing within twelve to fourteen months. Big job."

"A price worth paying if it destroys enough U-Boats."

"Oh yes, sir. We are already talking about taking the old girl into the Pacific to finish off the Japanese when the war in Europe is won."

"That'll be quite a journey."

"Shouldn't be too bad, sir. We can get seven knots out

of the engines when they're all working. These are electric motors mounted outside the hull, rather like an air-ship's. They're a confounded nuisance to maintain. The provisional plan is to go round the Horn, where there's plenty of free ice."

"Can't say I'd fancy spending my leave in Tierra del Fuego while the ship was being re-fitted."

"I can think of worse places, sir. I spent my last leave in Swansea."

The level of activity on the bridge had increased slightly.

Up here on the bridge was the only vulnerable part of the ship. If the U-Boat opened up on them with her 88 gun, it might do some damage. The Jerries would certainly be destroyed themselves, of course, but the U-Boat service was, by all accounts, getting recklessly brave.

Things were definitely hotting up. Men now spoke more loudly and urgently. Numbers, bearings, estimated speeds. "Train your glasses that way, midway across the starboard beam," said Summers, helpfully pointing rightwards. A lot of others were already pointing their inferior British glasses in the same direction.

Cameron could see nothing. He took the glasses from his eyes and saw a dozen tiny specks of aircraft apparently falling from the sky in a vertical line. He put the glasses back in time to see tiny flashes from the wings of the leading one, perhaps 3,000 yards distant. Somewhere else, a tannoy crackled into life. The leading pilot was making his attack. By God, but those men had guts. After diving down like that, they couldn't be sure of ever getting back up again.

Someone else yelled something about torpedo-tracks. Midships. The captain ordered a change of course, but it was too late.

Just beneath where they were standing there were two red flashes and a single, enormous thump. The ship shuddered and an enormous column of water rose up rapidly, then fell slowly.

A fine mist of sea-water wafted against the window, obscuring their view of everything outside.

"Anyone hurt?" growled the Captain.

"No, sir," said someone.

"Fine. Back to work everyone. Number One, report on casualties and damage please."

"She's dived," said a voice over the tannoy. "Break off, everyone. Give the Mosquitoes a crack at her."

The spray on the window was clearing now. Cameron lifted his glasses and watched the Mosquitoes run in, dropping their depth-bombs where they thought the submarine would be.

"Why didn't the guns fire on her position?" he asked Summers. "She'd have been in range, and we have plenty of 4.5-inchers."

"I expect it's because the aircraft wouldn't want any of our shells in the way. They do come in very low, you know."

It was true. The Mosquitos were flying very close to the water as they dropped their bombs.

Somewhere beneath the ocean, the first depth-charge exploded, sending a huge column of white water rising into the air. Moments later, you could just make out the distant rumble of the sound.

"Shouldn't you be down below, seeing to the damage?"

"I will do, sir, if the Chief calls me. Meanwhile, my job is to remain here and liaise with him if needs be."

"Do you think that torpedo did any damage?"

Summers smiled. "I very much doubt it. Pykrete is very strong stuff. We were sent to Canada to take her over while she was being commissioned. We actually met the chap who invented it. Name of Pyke. Typical mad professor type, very eccentric, but brilliant all the same. Back in the '20s he made a killing in the stock market with some system he invented, but frittered the lot away on some progressive school."

Cameron knew Pyke, though only by reputation. There were all manner of stories. "I heard a yarn," said Cameron. "He was in Canada and had to go and meet the Canadian Prime Minister, so he thought it as well to buy a new pair of trousers. So he got them, but found that the zip on them wouldn't work. So he had to go and visit the PM with his flies undone. 'I would not be meeting you in this condition,' says he, 'if your Canadian engineers were any good'."

"I suppose you heard the one about Mountbatten and Churchill in the bath?" said Summers.

Cameron had. Pyke had had this idea for building an aircraft carrier out of ice mixed with a little wood-pulp. This stuff, which he called pykrete, was stronger than concrete, easy to work as wood and melted considerably more slowly than ordinary ice. Pyke took the idea to Mountbatten, Head of Combined Operations, who was so captivated by the notion that he got a lump of the stuff and went straight round to see the Prime Minister. He was told that the PM was taking a hot bath and so barged straight in and threw a lump of pykrete into it. From that moment, Churchill had decreed that a ship should be built of the stuff in order to plug the air gap in Mid-Atlantic to protect convoys and hunt down U-Boats. The ship, he said, should be called HMS *Habakkuk*, from some Biblical quote.

Someone said something to the captain to the effect that there were no casualties and no immediate damage. Over to the starboard, the aircraft were still dropping their depth-charges while down on deck, others were being readied for take-off.

"The hull is 30 feet thick," said Summers. "A torpedo will make a dent around three feet deep. The only things likely to suffer any real damage are the engines, but we can always pull them out of the water, patch them up and stick them back on again. Oh, there go the terriers!"

Habakkuk's escorting destroyer (the *Kern*) and frigate (*Saltash*) had long since hard out from behind the ship, one from the bow, one from the stern and were almost on the scene, just holding off while the last of the aircraft dropped their explosives, eager to have their own go.

"There's an oil slick forming," said a pilot's voice over the tannoy. Cameron turned his glasses towards the area in which the aircraft had been dropping their charges. He could see nothing. He turned to see other officers doing likewise.

"Any sign of debris?" asked Summers.

"Here, you take a look," he handed the glasses to Summers, but as he did so he clearly saw a small smudge of

orange flare up and die out in the water. A moment later, the ocean's surface bubbled and boiled.

"That's a definite kill," said Summers. Down below, the deck crews and gunners were cheering and waving their helmets in the general direction of the aircraft. Things on the bridge were slightly more restrained, with murmurs of "excellent!" and "good work!" and "that's our third."

"Pipe down," barked the Captain. "Remember there are supposed to be other U-Boats in our vicinity."

He had considered bringing his revolver, but decided against it. Far too melodramatic. Besides, if he had had to use it, there would be a lot of uncomfortable explaining, and a mountain of paperwork.

"What did the MO say?" leaning on the rail and offering Cameron a cigarette.

"Quite a few burst eardrums," said Cameron accepting it and leaning on the rail. "Evans tells me there's a small printing press somewhere so I'm going to knock off some forms for them to fill in. But I'm going to wait a day or two, give them all a little more casual kindness to put them off their guard."

It had been Forbes who had suggested they come up to take the air after dinner. The weather had turned mild, and about as pleasant as it ever got out here, but then it was July after all.

As good a time for the confrontation as any.

In the evening light, you still couldn't mistake the sea for blue, but this was the first time Cameron hadn't felt it to be a mortal threat. The days were long out here, so they weren't completely alone. Men busied themselves with the Mosquitoes and Catalinas that were setting off or coming back from patrol, but they were in a quiet corner of the vast 2,000-foot-long deck. No one would notice too much here.

"Okay, Forbes, I may as well get it over with..."

Forbes turned, half-smiling. "Fire away, old boy."

"We've been watching you for a while. Two years to be precise. Caught you quite by accident passing material through dead-letter drops in Liverpool and Glasgow. We didn't do anything about it at the time because we had more important matters to attend to, but now the game's up."

"I'm sorry," said Forbes, refusing to meet Cameron's eye. "What's a dead-letter drop? Who's been watching me?"

"Oh stop it! You know perfectly well what I mean!"

"Do I?" Forbes sighed and leaned heavily on the rail, looking down at the water 40 feet below.

Cameron's turn to sigh. "If this war has taught me anything, it's to stop being so bloody British about everything, so I won't mince words. You have been passing secret military material to the Soviet Union for a number of years. For what it's worth I don't imagine that there's anything of any great value to them. Most of it they could get by subscribing to the *Daily Express* and *Picture Post*, but that, as I am sure you will appreciate, is hardly the point."

Forbes said nothing.

"So while it is true that I am out here to find out about the U-Boat Service's latest gadgetry, I have another job as well – you."

"They told me I was to look after you because as Guns I've got the least to do of all the senior officers." Forbes shook his head, as though in disgust at this deception.

"You have three choices."

"Do I? Do I really?" said Forbes. "I've had no choice at all for the last few years. It all started at Cambridge. They cultivated me, said I was a bright chap. Said they'd value my opinions on various aspects of world affairs. The threat of Hitlerism, appeasement, all that sort of thing. The next thing you know, you're writing essays for them, getting paid. Not that I didn't believe in it all. I still do, in a way. It's the Soviet Union that's doing most of the fighting with the Nazis."

And I suppose we're not doing any. All these brave Navy merchant sailors and their daily endurance of horrible weather, of torpedoes and burning oil, of praying for rescue in open boats or freezing water counts for nothing?

Cameron said nothing. Let him talk. He turned and leaned his back to the rail, facing away from Forbes. He watched admiringly as a Mosquito touched down on the deck, the arrester-hook at its tail grabbing onto the cables to bring her to a stop.

"I mean, one cannot be selfish, or even patriotic when so many millions are fighting and dying to save the world from fascism," he heard Forbes say. Cameron guessed he was crying, but didn't bother looking. This was a beastly, bloody business.

"Why now?" said Forbes after a long pause. "Why the sudden interest in me?"

Cameron let it hang for a while, then, "It's not just you. We're collaring every Soviet spy we know of, though I don't doubt there are hundreds more out there. Everything's changed lately, and it's all because of out here."

"Out here?"

"Certainly. The U-Boat war has proved even harder to win than we thought. That's why this hugely expensive ship was built. The tide is turning now but there are still enough U-Boats around. The Admiralty says it's all down to that chap Speer being put in charge of military production back in '42. The Jerries are making some very good submarines and in large numbers. While the Atlantic is crawling with U-Boats the Yanks are too busy with the Japanese to spare the ships to escort all the troops and equipment needed for the invasion of Europe. The plan had been to invade France this year, back in June. Now it'll be next spring at the very earliest. The Red Army will have taken Berlin by next June at the very latest. And after that, they can march all the way across to the English Channel if they want to, unless we get in first."

"But aren't we supposed to be allies?"

"At the end of the day the Soviet system and ours are incompatible. If you're a communist you must know that."

Forbes let out a small, bitter laugh. "Yes. It's funny, you know, being caught like this. As you said, I never gave them anything of any great value. They just like to have agents in place. You know, I've often wondered in the last few months if this ship is just as much about the Soviet Union as it is about Germany."

"Ever hear of an American military theorist called Alfred Thayer Mahan?"

Forbes turned his back to the rail and faced the same way as Cameron and sniffed loudly. "Of course. *The Influence of Sea-Power on History*, wasn't it? Said that while other countries built up big armies, the British Empire became pre-eminent because of its navy."

HMS *Habakkuk* had cost over ten million pounds to build, a stupendous sum for a country exhausted by almost five years of war. The Yanks had paid for most of it because they saw that the technical developments involved might well have further use once Germany and Japan had been defeated.

"We don't know what's going to happen," said Cameron. "Perhaps the Soviets will be at Calais by Christmas, or perhaps there'll be enough of western Europe left for us to save when we go in next year. But if the Ivans are at Calais, then we're going to make damn well sure that Britannia and Uncle Sam still rule the waves."

Forbes laughed and shook his head. "Won't work, old man. This isn't about engineering, it's about people. It's no good having more ships and tanks and aeroplanes if the people aren't behind you. The workers will rise up one day. Perhaps not tomorrow, or the day after, but they will eventually."

The thing was, if things went back to the way they were for working people before the War, Cameron wouldn't blame them.

"You said I have three choices?"

That's more than the Russian secret police would give you. The Mosquito that had just landed was towed past them towards one of the huge lifts that would take it down to the hangar-deck. The plane's two-man crew walked towards the island, pulling off goggles and flying-helmets and unzipping heavy sheepskin-lined jackets.

"The first is obvious. We place you under arrest and put you on trial. If found guilty you will be imprisoned or shot. All very quietly of course."

"Of course," said Forbes, turning to him and smiling weakly. "In the middle of a war it is easy to shoot someone quietly."

Cameron shrugged.

"And the second option?"

Cameron shrugged again. He didn't have to spell it out.

"Then there's the third option. As I say, I'm not just here to grill Jerries, though that's important as well. I'm also doing a little freelance work for a discreet operation known as Department 20."

"Never heard of it."

"No reason you should have, but it's been around since the start of the war, dealing with German and Italian agents in Britain. It's decided to branch out. Think of the name as a crossword clue."

Forbes' face seemed to liven up a little. Liked playing games, did Charles Forbes. Cameron could tell that when he arrived here a few days back. Took to helping him with all the subterfuges with the German prisoners like a good 'un. Enjoyed every minute of it, and not just because he might find out something of use to his Soviet masters.

"Twenty... Department 20... Let me think..."

Christ, Forbes, is this all it means to you?

Just a jolly parlour-game with men's lives as the stakes? Forbes' record was immaculate, though he had spent most of his time before now on battleships and hadn't seen too much action. That was why he didn't have the hard, ruthless edge that most others had by now. Not a bit like Evans the radio man, or even young Summers the refrigeration engineer.

"Got it. We put the 20 into Roman numerals. Two Xs. A double-cross."

Cameron nodded slightly. "You make a full confession, tell us everything you know about them and all you told them, then you come and work for us and tell them what we want you to tell them. Take some time to think about it if you like."

There was probably no way he could get a message off to them from here, though Cameron quietly suspected that there were communist sympathizers and fellow-travellers all over Britain, some of them in positions of influence.

Forbes shook his head. A breeze blew up and the remains of the sun disappeared behind a cloud. Cameron realized that he had not lit his cigarette at all. By now it would be forbidden to show a light on deck, even if the ship



was invulnerable. "I can give you a few days if you like."

Forbes was single. No wife, no kids, a couple of casual girlfriends here and there. Had a bit of money from his parents, with a little more to come when they died. Heavens, what did this pampered fool know about the working class?

"I'm sorry," said Forbes. "I don't need to think about it."

"Stalin is no plaster saint, you know. What about the famines in the 1920s, the forced collectivizations? All the purges? The man's almost as great an enemy of his own people as the Nazis are!"

"No, Bob, that's just capitalist propaganda..."

"Don't try and lecture me about propaganda, Charles. As I said before, we tell the truth and..."

"Stalin is the greatest enemy the Nazis have!" cut in Forbes. "He is the only man capable of defeating them on land, and it is Soviet Russia that will be responsible for the downfall of Nazism. Not us, not the Americans, because we're not ready to pay the price. The Russian people have demonstrated amply that they can pay the price, and they are doing it for all of us. I cannot betray them by feeding them false information, which is what you're asking me to do."

Such touching idealism, thought Cameron cynically. Most unfashionable for 1944.

"I don't suppose I have a fourth option?"

"None I can think of."

"I was thinking of pushing you over the side of the ship."

Cameron laughed cynically. "Then you really would be in trouble. Or do you think I came out here with nobody back home knowing what I was up to? Assuming you could get me into the water in the first place." Actually he probably could. I'm badly out of shape and one leg isn't much use.

"Oh, well. Just a thought." And with that, he turned seawards once more, leaned over the rail and disappeared head-first over the side.

Stupid war, stupid ideology, stupid bloody waste of a decent, intelligent man who in another life would grow up, make a useful contribution in whatever he did. In another world he might even grow up to be a democratic politician, perhaps even a Conservative. Cameron shuddered in the encroaching darkness and looked over the rail.

He waited a few minutes before shouting out, "Man overboard!"

Eugene Byrne's previous solo stories for *Interzone* were "Cyril the Cyberpig" (issue 66), "Bagged 'n' Tagged" (issue 101), "Alfred's Imaginary Pestilence" (issue 109) and "ThiGMOO" (issue 120; expanded as a novel of the same title, 1999). He is also known to *Interzone* readers as collaborator with his old school chum Kim Newman on the "USSA" stories (collected in the book *Back in the USSA*, 1997). Eugene lives near Bristol, and works for a local magazine.

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SINGING EACH TO EACH

Paul Di Filippo

Black-bordered, this innocuous modern picture-postcard offers to the eye a mostly white canvas partially occupied by a window of comber-sudsed sea, a sprawling figure, and some text. One-quarter of the sea-portrait hosts a stripe of hazy blue sky. In the upper left corner of the card, adjacent to the boxed-in seascape, the word "Mermaid" runs aslant in cursive; in a different yet equally frilly font, "Greetings from Southern New England" parallels the card's lower border. The partly human figure meant to define the lone prominent noun cuts dominantly across the entire middle of the card.

Starting on the left: the card's border trims off a small portion of fishtail, glossy black, orange and silver. The ribbed tail narrows into the scaly body, where a troutlike pointillism of umber and ivory begin to predominate. Now the fishbody widens, forming the "hips" of the figure. (Curiously, a small nugatory fin sprouts here, a feature of mermaids not discerned in most mythological representations.) As the "hips" narrow again toward the waist, the archetypal transformation occurs. Golden scales diffuse and melt irregularly into human womanflesh.

The woman is nude, visible upwards from just below her navel. Her human portion is curved skyward, torso arching away from her fishy nether region, not exactly as if to deny that morphological impossibility, part and parcel of her nature, but rather as if to signal aspiration and frolicsomeness. Ample breasts are partially concealed by strong arms folded across her chest. (Does a slight arc of areola show on the right one?) Her left hand curls protectively around her ribs, while the other maintains a strange mudra, index finger pointing downward like some arcanelly admonitory medieval saint. Her skin is not overly tanned, but as the shading-to-white slope of her gravity-sloshed breasts reveals, her epidermis is still somewhat duskier from exposure to the sun than any hypothetical winter hue.

The mermaid's wavy long hair glows a seemingly natural copper, pulled back and away from her three-quarters-profiled face and one visible ear, secured by a plain white fabric tie. Her bold chin is uplifted, pulling cords in her throat taut. Her painted lips part not precisely in a smile to reveal her bright upper teeth, and her heavy-lashed eyes are held either closed or narrowly slitted, concealing their colour.

She is not overyoung, this mermaid, nor hardbodied

like current supermodels. (Her age might accurately be pegged somewhere between 25 and 35.) Her belly pouches tenderly, her upper arms are plump, although the lines of her throat are sharp. Yet she is alluringly glamorous, carnal in the archaic manner of Betty Page, her piscine femininity undeniably potent, despite its banal, generic setting. From her image courses a kind of rude yet knowing vigour and pleasure in sheer existence.

This card came to me in an auction lot a little over a year ago, among a hundred others. Unused, its obverse bore no stamp nor message. Originally, I accounted myself lucky to have won the bidding on this lot, since it contained many fine specimens for my collection.

But that was before I found myself – unaccountably, yet, I still thought at first, harmlessly – bemused by this mermaid and then – more disturbingly, more compulsively – fascinated, enamoured, hypnotized by her silent siren song, by an unquenchable longing to meet, to hold, to have her, in whatever way the unguessable reality of her might allow.

Driving northward under louring late-autumn skies bland as skim-milk, attending with half my mind to the moderately trafficked freeway that was taking me further and further from my home, I wondered for the hundredth time about the wisdom of my current trip, and even once again started to question my basic sanity. Hot, tropical emotions surged confusingly through me like a school of fleeting fish, hard enough to identify and classify in their blurred passage, much less corral or catch among the coral of my heart.

I had never wanted or intended to fall in love – if love was what I was feeling – with the impossible photograph of a nameless stranger. Had anyone propounded such a hypothetical plight to me before my own misfortune, I would have laughed the notion away as an adolescent's jejune folly. But gripped in the selfsame predicament, I could only pine for the object of my fantasies and chastise myself for a fool, all without altering my feelings a whit.

Logically, I realized I was chasing the faintest of ghosts, attempting to track down the living model for a kitschy artefact from another era. I rode now in search of a woman who might no longer even exist, and who, if she still walked this earth, certainly did so on two human legs, not atop a squelching, bent, slab-muscle fishtail.

(And would encountering the desired woman and finding her merely mortal from the waist down produce the same sensations in my gut as the undismissible notion of meeting the depicted mermaid?)

My current course was plotted on the thinnest of clues, equivalent to a dying pirate's mumbled death-mutterings: a line of tiny print on the otherwise blank obverse of my postcard that read, "Distributed by Book & Tackle Shop, PO Box 1462, Westerly, RI, 02891."

And what real excuse, I continued to belabour myself, did I have for dragging my fantasies into action in the real world? That I was a 52-year-old bachelor, retired prematurely from teaching, with nothing better to do with his small sufficiency of time and money? That I was simply extending, from the library and internet into the non-virtual world, the research that had long satisfied my collector's soul? Or perhaps I could nobly cast my motives in terms of another person. The mermaid, despite her undeniable elan and vitality, seemed also to exude a kind of world-weariness, a certain weighty sadness or mortal angst. And why not? Would this not be exactly the expression such a chimera would wear, forever suspended between two worlds, into neither of which she comfortably fit, yet neither of which she could happily relinquish?

And surely, I must have crazily thought at the time, I could help her be happier, as if melding our two sorrows would birth one joy.

I stopped after the first 150 miles for breakfast at a roadside MacDonald's. Getting out of the car, I was forced to favour my stiffened lame left leg more than usual. Limping to the restaurant, I fancied myself some wooden-legged sailor just off his whaler.

The posters inside the MacDonald's coincidentally touted a recently reissued Disney animated film whose heroine synchronized so ironically with the object of my quest that I felt compelled, after using the toilet and ordering, to take my breakfast meal out to my cramped car, rather than eat it under that mockingly tawdry cartoon gaze.

Having begun my drive before dawn, I crossed the state line into Rhode Island not long after one o'clock in the afternoon.

Westerly was a border town, lying hard on the coast, and its exit came up quickly. Driving into the town's compact centre, I immediately felt more at ease. The small well-tended community evinced a quaint charm, an old-fashioned grace. Mammoth old stone civic buildings flanked a village green where the grass was still defiantly verdant in the face of impending winter. With the exception of a Starbuck's (its ironic cartoon logo I pointedly ignored), all the stores were non-franchised and exhibited a commercial well-being; the few citizens out strolling on this Wednesday afternoon appeared easy-going and happy. Far from being a clichéd hoary Lovecraftian sump, this town radiated normalcy. Everything appeared prosaic, rational, without the smallest trace of oddness or superstition. This reassuring environment where I hoped to discover – at the very least – more information regarding my mermaid served to remove my delusions from febrile inner twilight into commonsensical sunlight, rendering them simply whimsical.

Without leaving downtown, I parked outside a diner, heaved my reluctant limbs out of the car, and limped inside. The warm, peopled interior immediately fogged my glasses and filled my nostrils with a wealth of odours: bacon, coffee, wet wool, maple syrup, frying hamburger meat, tobacco. I stopped, removed my glasses, polished them, then found a seat at the counter.

A white-haired, ruddy-cheeked, apron-clad man immediately approached with steaming glass coffee-pot in hand, righted a cup inverted in its saucer before me, and self-assuredly poured me a mug of dark brew.

"What'll it be, chief?"

I picked an item off a hand-lettered placard. "The roast beef dinner sounds good."

"Got that right."

He turned to leave, but I detained him with a tentatively phrased question.

"I'm looking for a certain Book and Tackle shop...?"

"That'd be Ryecroft's place, in Watch Hill."

"Watch Hill?"

"Part of the town right on the shore. Just head east on Sulky Street."

"Thanks."

Another fellow, younger and wiry, turned from a seat further down. "You might not find Ryecroft in his shop. After Labour Day, he keeps it open pretty much only as he pleases. But anyone in Watch Hill can point you to his house."

"Thank you. You're very considerate."

"No problem."

I had always disliked that modern substitute for "you're welcome," but chose not to let this lapse of etiquette irk me. I felt both queasy and confident, somehow certain that I had not come so far merely to hit a dead end, yet leery of what I might discover about my dream maiden.

The old man returned shortly with my meal.

"Noticed you've got a bum leg. That stool comfortable enough?"

"Sure."

"Hard to get old. I got plenty of aches myself."

"I'm used to it. My leg's been bad since I was a child. Touch of polio, just before the vaccine came into use."

"Lucky enough then."

"I suppose so."

The tender gravied meat and homemade mashed potatoes and canned carrots went down pleasantly enough, although once in my car again, I couldn't recall ever tasting them at all.

Past fine homes and lesser ones, motels closed for the season and ice-cream and produce stands shuttered tight, beyond an elementary school noisy with recess-rampant children, the queerly named Sulky Street carried me toward the sea. Cresting a rise, I caught sight of the brooding Atlantic, laminated in aluminium. Hard by the water, a small collation of stores defined the neighbourhood nucleus of Watch Hill, and I saw that I could drive no further, the road looping back on itself in a circular cul-de-sac.

I parked in a legal spot on the curve, with no competition for spaces, as my car was the only one present. I stepped out into a bracing breeze, heavy with marine scents and a peppering of fine sand from the beach beginning only a few yards away. A small weather-boarded carousel hunkered down between sidewalk and strand, the ghost of its summertime tinny music almost audible, like a lonely dowager humming to herself. Like all summer resorts beset by winter, Watch Hill radiated a melancholy somnolence, as bracing in its own way as a dignified old age. Most of the stores, all visibly catering to tourists, were closed. Almost immediately, I spotted the Book and Tackle sign on a weathered building, and crossed the empty street directly for it. My heart was thumping most uncommonly fast, but I attributed it to the diner's strong coffee.

A creaky wooden porch held a dangerously canting bookcase whose sloping boards exactly matched the pitch of the shabby porch roof. The case was stuffed with cheap paperbacks and hardcovers. A sign advised any patron to take what he wanted and put the appropriate money through the mailslot. Dusty windows half obscured with piled material showed dark.

Disheartened, convinced by these tokens that the store was closed, I nonetheless tried the doorknob. Much to my surprise, it yielded, and I stepped quickly inside, out of the cold wind.

The familiar musty smell of old books congregating enveloped me. I moved a few paces down a narrow aisle hedged by haphazard stacks of books, and into the unheated twilight interior of the store, careful not to dislodge any of the precariously heaped volumes. I turned a corner, and confronted across the width of the store a flyspecked display case filled with fishing lures – their chrome gone rusty in spots – and spools of monofilament line: the “Tackle” portion of the shop. Behind the jumbled counter sat a wizened, grizzled elderly fellow wearing a green plastic eyeshade and a tattered archaic lumberman's plaid jacket.

“Help you?”

“No thank you, just browsing.”

I had noted the wire spinner rack full of postcards next to the owner's – Ryecroft's – perch, but decided to avoid it for the moment. I turned at random to the nearest shelf, and found myself facing the poetry section. My eye fell on a Faber edition of Eliot, and I took it down. The pencilled price inside was much too high, but it was an edition I didn't own, and so I retained the book as I moved about the cramped store.

After what I supposed was enough time spent playing the idle customer, I approached the counter and laid my find down. Within Ryecroft's personal space, I could smell whisky and pipe tobacco and unwashed hair. “I'll take this one, please.”

Gnomishly intent, Ryecroft picked up the book. “Hmph. Not too popular any more, this oldster.”

“I've always had a fondness for his Prufrock.”

The bookseller brightened at the prospect of some literary banter. “Dry wearisome codger, that one. ‘Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? I shall

wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. I do not think they will sing to me.”

Ryecroft finished his recitation proudly, but I was too distressed by his accidentally apposite allusion to properly applaud him. Instead, as if suddenly noticing the postcards, I turned to the rack. Spinning it creakily, I instantly spotted my card, a thick stack of dozens. The sight of my familiar mermaid duplicated for the uncaring and undeserving masses raised a feeling of disorientation in me. I plucked a lone, sun-bleached sample of the card and dropped it atop the book.

“As long as you've raised the subject of mermaids, I may as well take this too. I can use it as a bookmark. Rather striking image, isn't it?”

Ryecroft glowed. “Ain't it, though? Big-seller, that one. I had that card done up personally.”

“Really?” I felt on the verge of fainting as I asked my next question. “Who was the model? Someone local?”

Ryecroft scratched his dandruffy scalp through the ring of his eyeshade. “Lord, I can't rightly recall. That there photo's 30, 35 years old, you know.”

My heart convulsed at the confirmation of my worst suspicions. “Oh. So your mermaid would be at least my age by now.”

“Yup.”

Desperation urged words out of my constricted throat. “What about the photographer? Might he still be around?”

“Nils Standeven? Sure, he's getting on, like all of us. But he still keeps his studio going. I bet he'd remember the gal he used for this shot.” Ryecroft winked luridly and tapped the postcard with a dirty fingernail. “Probably had good reason to, if half of what I hear about the young Nils and his models is true.”

I wanted to choke the old man for his vile insinuations, but restrained myself and simply asked, “How much do I owe you?”

We settled up, and then, as if voicing an afterthought, I said, “Whereabouts is Standeven's establishment? I might look him up.”

Without any apparent further interest in my motives, Ryecroft gave me the directions I needed. (Standeven's place was only a few miles away.) Turning to leave, I noted the westering sun outside – it was past three – and suddenly felt the full weight of my long day. My investigations would have to wait till tomorrow.

“Is there a nearby motel open at this time of the year?”

“Not rightly a motel, but there's a bed-and-breakfast out on Route One, the Mirror and Comb.”

After learning the way to the B&B, I left Ryecroft's.

The owners of the Mirror and Comb, Pete and Nicky Crow, were also Watch Hill's doctor and druggist. Mr Crow was responding to a mother in labour, but I caught his pharmacist wife just as she was heading out to open up her store for an emergency prescription. She kindly paused long enough to get me registered and settled.

Stretched out on the comfortable bed with a cup of tea and some biscuits, I picked up Eliot's poems, but found

myself unable to focus my mental powers sufficiently to read them. Instead, I switched on the television to a random channel, and caught the opening minutes of a Jim Carrey movie, half-recognizing it as a remake of some older film starring Don Knotts. After only minutes, my mind revolving a hundred jumbled thoughts, I fell deeply asleep, shoeless but still dressed, lying atop the coverlet, and didn't wake till eight the next morning.

Standeven Studios – “Portraits a Speciality” – occupied a small converted church in a mixed residential and business zone. Unpruned bare trees clustered closely around the building, and overgrown evergreen shrubbery encroached on the walkway to the front double doors. The clapboards of the steeple were practically bare of paint, while the lower reaches of the building – about as high as a man on a stepladder might reach – were hued a rich blue that seemed to sublime at its edges into today's bright sky.

The hour was eleven. I had lingered over a good breakfast at the Mirror and Comb, reading a local newspaper that induced a foreigner's disorientation with its obscure issues and personages, while subliminally puzzling over my emotions. I realized that playing the detective yesterday with Ryecroft had left me feeling foolish. What was I doing here, haunting this faded resort town like a restless ghost? Almost then I set out for home. But in the end, although I did check out of the B&B, thanking the Crows for their service, I drove not south but merely a mile or so west to Standeven's.

Knocking on the church doors, I tried to imagine the scene – confrontational or pleasant – that might follow. But nothing prepared me for the sight that met my eyes as the lefthand door swung open under someone's hand.

I was looking directly into the unpartitioned nave, flooded with sunlight both unfiltered and also tinted from several stained glass windows. But although there were no interior walls, the space was hardly empty. Quite to the contrary, it was jam-packed with hundreds and hundreds of oddball items, arrayed on cabinets and shelves and tables – props no doubt for the photographer's trade, a cabinet of curios enlarged beyond sane bounds.

In the span of a few seconds, I registered several stuffed animals (a gull, a raccoon, a fox, a ferret) dozens of vases, old machine parts, a pile of textile bobbins, antique farm tools, old milk bottles, heaps of horseshoe-crab shells – and these were just the nearest items. The unexpected bazaar seemed endless in its variety and extent.

On the raised dais of the chancel area, an upright Japanese folding screen partially shielded a rumpled bed which stood next to a sloppy-topped bureau.

The man on the other side of the door spoke. “Can't say I like this damn cold one bit, and it's only early December. Don't just stand there, friend. Come in.”

I entered, and Nils Standeven shut the door.

The photographer was barefoot, dressed in beltless loose-fitting jeans and faded flannel shirt. At least ten or twelve years older than I, he nonetheless still flaunted the vestiges of what must have once been a startling

square-jawed handsomeness. Like the well-kept ruin of many a Hollywood star – Mitchum, say, or Heston – he exuded a self-confidence tempered only slightly by the ravages of age. Additionally, an insouciant insulation – derived from what I assumed was a lifelong bohemianism – seemed to protect him from the standard indignities of his years.

Standeven regarded me with neutral blue eyes. “How can I help you? If you want to book my services for a wedding, I have to tell you right off that I'm busy every weekend between now and New Year's. Lord, these local kids are mating like swans! Even got a couple of dates involving old duffers like us. But it's never too late for love, right?”

I opted for a truthful approach. “No, no, it's not a wedding. I'm interested in a postcard you once did.”

Presented with the card I had purchased yesterday, Standeven narrowed his eyes. “Should've known. Out of all the cards I made up for Ryecroft over four decades, that's the only one anyone ever asks about. Just my fate to be remembered for a stupid damn cut-and-paste job, rather than all the beautiful work I've poured my heart into.”

Talk of other interested parties worried me, but I focused instead on the mention of artifice. “Cut-and-paste?”

Standeven laughed heartily. “Hell, you didn't figure she was real, did you? Would I be living in goddamn Westerly Rhode Island if I had discovered a real mermaid? Her back half's a trout. I hand-painted the scales where they join her belly.”

I must have looked crestfallen or disbelieving, because Standeven immediately hustled off to rummage among his disordered props. After a minute of muted grumbling and cursing, he returned with a whole mounted fish whose body, although worse for the years, was plainly identical with the image in the postcard.

I felt the need to sit down, but no chair presented itself. My gimpy leg trembled, but all I could do was stammer, “And – and the woman? Just some anonymous model clipped from the skin magazines, I suppose?”

Standeven laid down the trophy and regarded me solemnly. “No sir, she's real enough. A local gal. Happens I know her quite well.”

“Could – could you tell me her name?”

“What's your interest in her?”

“Nothing untoward. I'd just like to meet her.”

“I don't know – ”

Inspiration struck. “I'm a collector. I'd like both you and her to sign the card. It will increase its value considerably.”

“Collector, huh? Where was the Teich Company headquarters?”

“Chicago. Founded 1896, closed 1974. I've been to the museum that holds their archives, in Wauconda, Illinois.”

Standeven remained silent for a long moment, until I was convinced I had lost him. Certain of defeat, I almost failed to comprehend his approval.

“Her name's Margot, Margot Tench. She lives just outside the town, on Cliffside Road. Margot don't see so

many people nowadays that I suppose she'd mind a visit from a fan."

"Thank you, thank you so much." I turned to leave, and Standeven stopped me.

"What about me signing your souvenir?"

"Oh, of course!"

I was halfway back to my car when the photographer called out to me.

"Treat Margo kindly, you hear! She's had a hard life."

Cliffside Road incarnated its name, winding along the top of a substantial bluff bordering the surging sea. Wind-warped cedar pines and riotous stands of bayberry bushes and beach roses were the only landscaping. In spots, the land closest to the sea was crumbling under the patient assaults of the environment: on the fractional portion of one house lot, the broken half of a sagging foundation protruded horizontally into the air, precariously balanced over the wave-washed rocks below. I supposed that this geological instability explained why the houses here were mainly ramshackle affairs, despite the incredible views, which otherwise would have certainly commanded top-dollar.

Could my beautiful mermaid really live in such a neighbourhood? I tried to reconcile her youthful proud demeanour, the bold vitality that had first attracted me to her picture, with the shabbiness and poverty I saw around me, but failed.

Driving slowly, I scanned each widely separated mailbox for her name. The sky had gone grey as ominous clouds moved in to occlude the blue. So intently was I focused on each approaching letterbox that when the one bearing Margot Tench's hand-printed name appeared, I needed an awkward moment to correlate the dwelling I saw with the anticipated mailbox.

In the centre of a quarter-acre lot strewn with threadbare tires, a shopping cart and other debris, an old rust-patched Airstream trailer rested on cinderblocks, tethered to civilization only by a drooping power line running from the streetside pole. A few dried stalks of vegetation spiked futilely into the hard ground outside the trailer's jury-rigged wooden steps recorded the passage of that summer's sparse flowers. Twin propane tanks huddled against the trailer's flank like the faulty booster rockets on a doomed space shuttle.

I pulled into a short gravel drive and shut off the car's motor. My mind had gone blank with despair, and only a crude automatism carried me from the car to the trailer's flimsy door.

My hesitant knock was answered in reasonable time by the shambling mortal remains of my mermaid.

Margot Tench had not gotten obscenely fat with middle age, just typically, hopelessly stocky. Whatever phantom curves she might possibly have retained were hidden now beneath a cheap shapeless dress and a pilly synthetic cardigan. But the thickness of her calves and ankles – feet shoved into dirty crushed slippers – argued against any concealed treasures of shapeliness. Her distinctive sharp facial features that had once smiled into oceanic infinity had collapsed much like the surrounding

cliffs, pillowing downward in crevassed folds. A wild kelp-forest of grey hair exhibited a strand or two of fugitive sullen copper amidst the drabness. And whatever height Margot Tench might have once attained in her youth (I realized now for the first time that the addition of the fish tail in the photograph had left me with an impression that she would stand quite tall), she now came up barely to my shoulder.

"What's your business?" she demanded, in a rough voice coarsened by cigarettes and drink.

"I – I wanted to meet this woman."

She did not flinch from the sight of the postcard, glancing unblinkingly at what had to be a hauntingly painful image before pinning me with wrinkle-cupped eyes I now noted were a deep marine green.

"You're 30 years too late. But you can come in anyhow, if you still got a mind to."

The interior of the trailer was lit by a naked fluorescent fixture flickering in the low ceiling. A metal-topped table paired with two stark chairs took up a lot of floor space near a small sink and countertop hotplate. A spavined recliner faced a TV; a bunk folded downward from the wall. The space smelled like boiled cabbage and mould.

Margot Tench shuffled about. "Let me pump the heat up a little. There. The place leaks air like a goddamn sieve! I was just gonna have myself a beer. Want one?"

"All right, please, I will."

From a dorm-sized fridge, she withdrew two cans of Golden Anniversary beer. No glass was offered, so I popped my tab and tasted the drink tentatively. It was truly awful.

Margot dropped heavily into a wooden chair. "Have a seat."

I took the chair opposite her. Beneath the table, our knees nearly touched.

She pushed a chapped reddened hand through her snarled hair. "Not what you expected, huh? Sorry to let you down. But you might say life let me down first."

"Would you care to tell me about it?"

She slugged her beer from the can, and then looked wearily at me. "Not a lot to tell, but why the hell not? You look friendly, and talk kills some time, right?"

"I met Ben Tench in 1965. He was a cod fisherman out of Galilee. That's a local town up the coast. Awfully handsome guy – nice to women too. We got married not long after he heard me sing one night at a little party. We had three good years together, before his ship went down with all crew lost. Poor Ben. He didn't leave me any savings, and I had never even had a job before. I lost our house, and bought this trailer second-hand with a little life-insurance money from the fishermen's co-op. Headed south with some notion of reaching Florida, but my old heap died in Westerly. Been here ever since."

She lit up an unfiltered cigarette, and I noticed the overflowing ashtray between us. Exhaling a foul cloud, she continued her story.

"What could I do? I set up as the town whore. It wasn't a bad life, till my looks went. The men were mostly decent – I got this land deeded to me by a customer – and

even a few of the local womenfolks liked me well enough. Oh, there were the usual reformers, preachers and cops and the like, but I mostly ignored them. Then there was Nils, Nils Standeven.”

“I’ve met him. He seems like a gentleman.”

Margot’s eyes hazed over. “Oh, that he was. He showed a real interest in my welfare. Set me up with a few modelling jobs, but I never took to that life. I found out you had to mostly screw someone first to get a posing job, so I said, ‘Hell this is *double* the work for the same money!’, and I just eliminated the posing. Let me see that card.”

I passed over the postcard, and Margot studied it intently. I assessed her tilted face with a grim fascination, but couldn’t begin to fathom the depths of what she might be thinking or feeling.

“Lord, I sure enough was a sweet little piece, wasn’t I? I think I was high on some killer weed Nils shared with me during that shoot. Explains that weird look I had.” She flipped the card back at me, and I let it land atop the table. “If I had just a lousy nickel for every one of these sold, I sure wouldn’t be here today. But all I got was a hundred bucks, and I called Nils generous at the time. Shit.”

I got clumsily to my feet, my rotten leg throbbing.

“Hey, where are you going? We’re just getting to know each other. You look like a classy guy, stay awhile. I haven’t forgotten everything I once knew.”

Horribly, the old woman began to unfasten the top buttons of her dress.

I knocked over my full beer in my haste, and scrambled blindly at the door handle. Outside, my mind ablaze with shame, self-pity, horror and disgust, I trotted lopsidedly away from my car. I was in no shape to get behind the wheel, I’d have an accident for sure. A short walk in the open air would clear my mind and senses, I felt, allow me to accept my failure and become reconciled to the horrible travesty my mermaid had become.

Across the road, some hundred yards from the trailer, I slowed down and risked a glance over my shoulder.

Margot Tench stood forlornly in the door of her trailer, watching me.

The sky had begun to let down an intermittent drizzle. I flipped up my coat collar and increased my pace.

Something drew me to the edge of the bluff. Perhaps I imagined the clean sight of the innocent sea would restore my heart to me.

Looking back nervously, I saw that Margot had put on a coat and was walking toward me.

The edge of the cliff was capped with brown grass. As I spun about, intending to distance myself from the approaching woman, the wet grass and my weak leg both betrayed me, and I went flying over the edge.

I don’t suppose it was more than 30 feet down. But my impact with the deep freezing water felt as if a giant had picked me up by the heels and slammed me against a concrete wall. My right shoulder smashed into a boulder, but luckily the rest of me encountered no rocks. Stunned below the water, I knew I had to struggle or drown, so I battled my way back to the surface.

I was just in time to greet a huge wave with my face.

I choked and flailed, but the undertow sucked me further out.

When I came up for the second time, I caught a wild glimpse of Margot Tench standing fixedly atop the cliff. I dragged up enough strength to yell: “Help! Help!”

She didn’t run to summon rescuers, and I recalled with a vivid pang her lack of a phone. Instead, to my utter amazement, she opened her mouth and began to sing.

The husky voice of the old woman was miraculously replaced by a supernal, dulcet sweetness. Wordlessly, the strange entrancing melody she was singing lanced out above even the crash of the surf.

But I heard no more. My bad leg cramped then, so severely that it bent me ineluctably in half. The waters swallowed me as I frantically tried to ease my calf and thigh muscles by massaging them with frozen hands I could not even feel. My lungs threatened to explode, and realized I had lost track of which direction was up.

And that was when I saw the pair of them, with the hyperacuity of panic, despite the gloomy, turbulent underwater scene resembling planes of fractured green glass.

Powerful golden tails, bountiful buoyant breasts, streamers of bronze hair, cryptic smiles, eyes protected by a transparent membrane, small useless fins on their hips.

Two powerful arms fastened around my sternum from behind and pumped my lungs empty of dead air. But before I could inhale water, a mouth pressed against mine. I clawed wildly, but my wrists were pinioned by irresistible hands.

The air that I desperately drew in from the mermaid’s donor lungs tasted of brine and raw shellfish and salt-water taffy. Her tongue met mine, and then she pulled back.

Seconds later, I lay half out of the water, safe on a pebbled strand.

I listened for Margot’s song, but she must have stopped singing once her sisters arrived, as she realized her summons was successful. Instead, I heard only the common siren of an onrushing ambulance.

My right hand was clenched, I realized. With effort, I forced it open.

Several strands of beautiful red hair curled across my palm.

But even as I stared at them they changed in my sight to Margot’s grey.

Paul Di Filippo is the subject of the interview that follows. He lives in Providence, Rhode Island (not far from the setting of the above tale), and his previous stories in these pages include, among others, “Alice, Alfie, Ted and the Aliens” (issue 117), “The Cobain Sweater” (issue 120), “The Happy Valley at the End of the World” (issue 125), “Angelmakers” (issue 141) and “Stealing Happy Hours” (issue 153).

Paul Di Filippo is an eminent practitioner of bohemian science fiction. His numerous stories make themselves comfortably at home in many different milieux, styles and sub-genres. A Di Filippo story can jump effortlessly from Ancient Rome to Alice's Wonderland, from Emily Dickinson's parlour to the infinite grasslands of the afterlife; and the author's language follows suit, shifting from neo-Victorian diction to contemporary slang to hallucinated future argot with a like masterful ease. This literary hyper-kineticism allows Di Filippo to inhabit his many settings with sympathetic imagination, but also with the intent of a critical trickster, one who sharply deconstructs, parodies and satirizes his subjects.

Di Filippo's short fiction has appeared in many markets since his debut with "Rescuing Andy" in 1985, including, very notably, *Interzone*, which has published such major stories as "Walt and Emily," "The Happy Valley at the End of the World," and "The Double Felix." In the mid-1990s, collections began to appear in steady succession from small presses: *The Steampunk Trilogy* (1995), *Ribofunk* (1996), *Fractal Paisleys* (1997) and *Lost Pages* (1998), from Four Walls Eight Windows, as well as a chapbook volume, *Destroy All Brains!*, issued by Pirate Writings. *Ribofunk* was the first of these books to achieve mass-market distribution, as an Avon paperback in 1998.

Di Filippo's first (published) novel, *Ciphers*, a long Pynchonesque extravaganza concerning genetics, rock music and much else, was issued jointly by two further small presses, Permeable and Cambrian, in 1997; the latter publishes a second novel, *Joe's Liver*, in 2000. Meanwhile, Di Filippo continues a prolific career at shorter lengths: new short stories appear regularly, his influential and wide-ranging critical column is featured every two or three months in *Asimov's* magazine, and his genre spoofs and commentaries enliven *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* under the heading "Plumage From Pegasus."

May 2000

A STEAMPUNK OF THE TRAILER PARKS



Paul Di Filippo
interviewed by
Nick Gevers

Nick Gevers: Can you say something about your personal background, and about how your experiences have shaped your writing?

Paul Di Filippo: As a prodigious reader of fiction since early youth, I fear I was deformed by this loner's addiction to simulated realities, rendered unfit for any workplace role not involving words creatively distilled onto paper. A rebellious, anti-authoritarian streak also makes me chafe at "normal" employment, most of which I consider shamefully misdirected, stifling and detrimental to real human life. As for quotidian influences upon theme and topic, I notice in my own work a certain fascination with money and the average working stiff, reflecting perhaps my own lower middle-class background.

NG: Reading your work, certain cultural influences are clear: rock music, the Beatniks, Thomas Pynchon, Philip K. Dick, the cyberpunks. Can you enlarge on how these have been assimilated into your fiction? What other influences are salient?

PDF: As John Crowley has famously observed, there is a class of books "made from other books." While I often pay homage to favourite authors and try to riff off literary works, I feel it is essential to ground myself in lived experiences as well. Born past the midpoint of the famous US Baby Boom (1954), I spent my formative years wide-eyed and sensitive during one of the most tumultuous periods of global history. I cannot conceive of what my writing would be like if I had not, say, worn a black armband to school to protest the bombing of Cambodia, or watched Nixon swept from office. All these daily experiences, not visibly connected to fiction-making, exert subterranean influences on the mind that conceives and instantiates the stories.

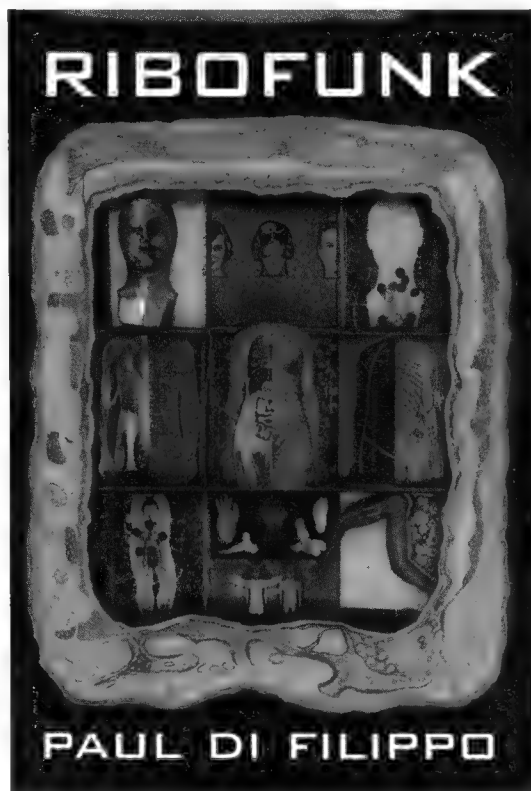
NG: But still: you're an accomplished pasticheur, often employing parody as a literary tool; in this, you resemble Howard Waldrop and Kim Newman. What draws you to this technique? Is it an inevitable concomitant of your variety of alternate and secret history?

PDF: Pastiche, appropriation, detouring – these are all acknowledged techniques of postmodernism, a movement I feel great sympathy with, although I can also empathize with and enjoy reading and producing "unselfconscious" straight-ahead narrative. I've always felt that a writer could not be for eternity if he were not simultaneously part of his times. As postmodernism seemed the most exciting movement of our times, I

allowed myself to be swept up in it, reacting instinctively to its virtues. I dimly sense that postmodernism is fading, and eagerly await whatever new currents arise into which I might hurl myself.

NG: You're known chiefly as a short-story writer – a versatile and prolific one. Is the short form something you specialize in by choice?

PDF: I love short stories, and when setting out to become a "professional" writer, gravitated toward them simply because I had internalized the old pulp model of professionalism: sell a lot of great stories to the sf 'zines, then produce a novel. John Varley was probably the last person fully to



embody this old pattern. But the publishing template had shattered just when I was starting out, and my transition to novels proved harder than planned.

NG: I recall reading in one of David Garnett's *SF Yearbooks* that a decade ago you had already produced several novels, which had yet to find publishers. *Ciphers* has, of course, since appeared; but how many novels have you written in all, and what are their prospects for publication now?

PDF: I've written six solo novels, and two collaborative mysteries with Michael Bishop. The first book, *Harp, Pipe, and Symphony*, was a fantasy based on the legend of Thomas Rhymer, and seems unlikely ever to appear. The second novel was *Joe's*

Liver, a contemporary comedy, and should be out as of this writing from Cambrian. *Ciphers* came third, then *Spondulix*, a short version of which appeared in *SF Age*. *Spondulix* is slated to appear from Cambrian eventually. *Fuzzy Dice* is my homage to Rudy Rucker, and remains unsold. Finally, in 1999 I completed *A Mouthful of Tongues*, an erotic dark fantasy, again unsold.

NG: As it's about to be published, can you say something more about *Joe's Liver*?

PDF: *Joe's Liver* concerns the misadventures of an illegal Caribbean immigrant to the USA named Reader's Digest, nicknamed Ardy. Raised on the precepts of his illustrious namesake magazine, Ardy finds the modern America quite a different proposition from his dreams. Of such clashes is all great comedy born!

NG: All of your books to date – five collections and one novel – have appeared as small-press editions; you have a very definite affinity with the small-press sector, as your critical column in *Asimov's* shows. Why are you such a strong advocate of the small presses, and how do you assess their future role?

PDF: I admire the spunk, daring, inventiveness and quixotic nature of small presses and try to boost them whenever possible. So far, they have been the only publishers who would have me! I have no particular ideological or ethical brief against the big publishers. I've seen them do what I thought were some really dumb things, but then again, who among us hasn't committed stupidities? If they want me, they can have me!

NG: You've now had four major collections published by Four Walls Eight Windows. Moving on to the first of these, *The Steampunk Trilogy*: this is by its title an exemplification of the steampunk sub-genre. What's your opinion of the wider body of steampunk literature? Which would you identify as the most significant steampunk novels?

PDF: Realizing that no book published prior to mine had yet utilized the catchy word "steampunk" in its title, I made a pre-emptive strike and high-handedly appropriated the term. I originally wanted to call the book simply *Steampunk*, but my publisher prevailed for the extant title. The original neologism, of course, is pretty solidly attributed to K. W. Jeter. I find our fascination with Victorian culture and technology justifiable, since so much of our contemporary culture has its roots in this earlier era. A solidly spec-

ulative work like Gibson/Sterling's *The Difference Engine* actually provides valuable thought-experiments that illustrate and illuminate our current problems in the light of Victorian choices. But I fear I fall solidly into the contrasting Blaylock-Powers mode of steampunk, in which the era is exploited in a Ruritanian fashion: the past as foreign country where they do things in a silly, Monty-Pythesque way. Hopefully, some valid cultural commentary still emerges amidst the nonsense and satire. I've not read several seminal steampunk works – such as Jeter's *Infernal Devices* or Priest's *The Space Machine* – but nonetheless maintain that the sub-genre offers lots of fun and plenty of territory for honest speculation.

NG: *The Steampunk Trilogy* amounts to a sort of science-fictional *Eminent Victorians*, wreaking gleeful havoc on the lives of Queen Victoria, Louis Agassiz, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, among others. Why did you choose these particular individuals?

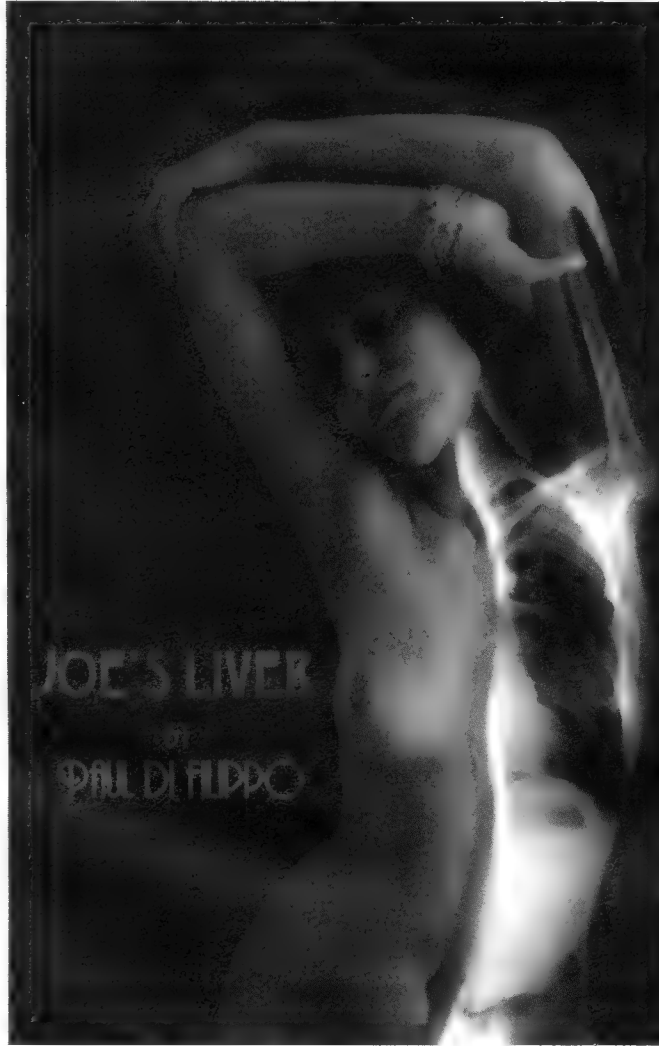
PDF: If you are going to use a historical personage as a character, it behooves you, first, to pick someone not over-utilized. I don't really care to write or read another word about an imaginary Charles Dickens, for instance. Second, choose someone you can really sympathetically inhabit, if that person is to be your protagonist. For me, that included Dickinson and Whitman. Or, third, in the case of Louis Agassiz, pick someone so outrageous that he will propel the plot by his sheer ornery vitality!

NG: The first novella in *The Steampunk Trilogy*, "Victoria," involves the replacement of the actual Queen with, as the blurb puts it, a sexy human/newt clone. Was this designed as a commentary on Victorian sexual inhibition? And/or as a judgment on the legendary lack of intelligence of the Queen and her family?

PDF: The seed for "Victoria" was actually my repeated listening to the Kinks' song of the same name! And maybe the John Cleese bit in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: "She turned me into a newt... But I got better!" Once given those springboards, though, I did of course consciously choose to comment on Victorian sexual mores and on necessary monarchical abilities.

NG: The second novella, "Hottentots,"

makes quite elaborate fun of the scientific racism prevalent in the 19th century. To this end, you imagined a very vivid marriage between the daughter of the so-called Hottentot Venus (Saartjie Baartman) and a Dutch farmer, and brought in H. P. Lovecraft's daft biology near the story's conclusion. Could you expand on the motivation behind these inclusions?



PDF: The mix-'n'-match genesis of certain of my stories is hard to reconstruct. But I do indeed like to take seemingly divergent or incompatible ideas and jam them together into the same narrative. I call this the "Day in the Life" method, after the perhaps apocryphal anecdote which recounts that Lennon and McCartney had two songs that just didn't work separately until they fused them and came up with the famous masterpiece. For instance, in "Lennon Spex" (appropriately enough) I had two separate notions – visible emotional cords and magic spectacles – neither of which seemed strong enough to carry a story until I married them. In "Hottentots," it seemed to me that once having chosen racism as my theme, and having set the story in New England, I could

also fruitfully bring in Lovecraft's infamous fear of miscegenation as counterpoint or subtext.

NG: "Walt and Emily," the final novella in *The Steampunk Trilogy*, portrays an admittedly rather surreal relationship between Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. Do you think this could actually have eventuated, given the famous reclusiveness of the one and the homosexuality of the other?

PDF: History is strewn with lacunae that a better Cosmic Author would have filled in. The non-meeting between Dickinson and Whitman is one such lack. Such a conjunction does not seem beyond the bounds of probability, since 19th-century Amherst, Massachusetts, did lie on the fringes of the larger literary world, and Whitman did travel extensively. As far as a love affair between the poets, I think the best scholarship labels Whitman bisexual. And Dickinson's own poems certainly betray passion and carnality, although stymied.

NG: "Walt and Emily" features the association, and eventual literal fusion in an hermaphrodite, of Whitman and Dickinson, a process that arises again, more complexly, in "Alice, Alfie, Ted, and the Aliens" (in *Lost Pages*). Is this search for a lost primal unity fundamental to your work?

PDF: Hermaphrodites also figure in *Ciphers*. I would assert that out of all the deep archetypes the writer has to draw from, this is simply one of the most fascinating and rich, full of literal and subliminal meanings.

NG: *Ribofunk*, your second Four Walls collection, is notable for its stylistic experimentation, which evokes a gauchely transformative biotechnological future by means of language perhaps recalling Joyce (via Aldiss *Barefoot in the Head?*). What motivated this approach? And do you think your concept of a biotech-oriented sub-genre of sf – biopunk or ribofunk – has caught on?

PDF: Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* was also uppermost in my mind when writing the *Ribofunk* stories. It simply seems to me that any sf work which claims accurately to imagine an attainable future – i.e., not a surreal but a linear scenario – is going to have to deal with language changes. Half of our conversation and writing would be

unintelligible to someone from 1900. How could the future be any less warped? Altered language contributes immeasurably to the reader's sense of inhabiting a truly future world. As for the spread of "ribofunk" the philosophy, I do see it trickling out. Paul McAuley, Simon Ings – a few writers have moved into this territory. I also note that Bruce Sterling has adopted my notion of an ultra-environmental movement known as "Viridians" for his own purposes.

NG: In reading *Ribofunk*, I kept being reminded of 1950s or early 1960s youth culture. Is this a valid impression?

PDF: Again, although not an intentional model for these stories, the period of my impressionable youth has doubtlessly influenced the *Ribofunk* canon.

NG: *Ribofunk*, while maintaining due jocosity to the end, is in reality about the long-term obsolescence, and absorption into something other, of the entire human race. Why did you juxtapose humour with apocalyptic surrealism in this way?

PDF: I suppose anyone's attitude toward disaster stems from their general philosophy of life. As mentioned, I'm generally sanguine about existence, though I certainly see its dark side. As the American Buddhist sage Robert Aitken once said (in paraphrase): "We do all we can to prevent disaster. But if disaster comes, we accept it as natural." Only unyielding identification with the human species above all other species prevents us from seeing the end of *Ribofunk* as positive. After all, by book's closing, the Earth is arguably more full of vital intelligent life than ever before!

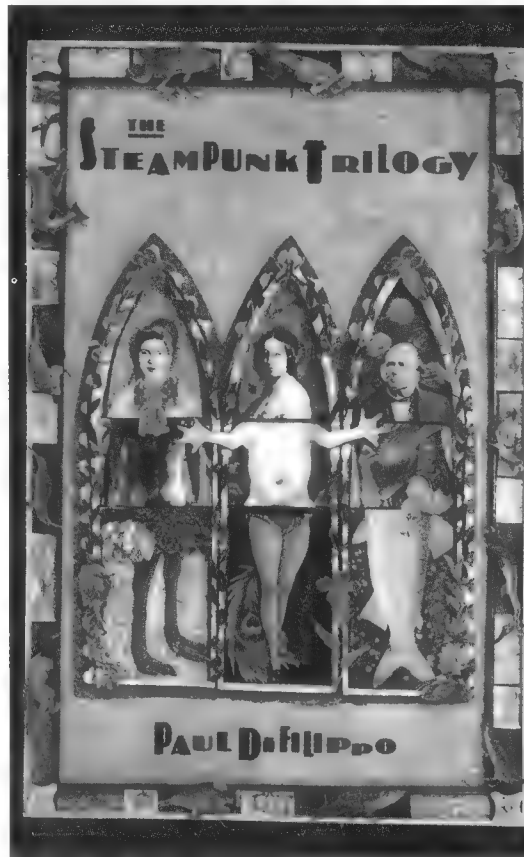
NG: *Fractal Paisleys*, your third collection, is unlike *The Steampunk Trilogy* and *Ribofunk* in being not a cycle of connected stories but rather a gathering of technically similar trailer-park sf yarns. What does the trailer-park label signify?

PDF: The stories in *Fractal Paisleys* might very well be my default setting, the kind of stuff I would instinctively write if not consciously meditating on other modes. I am basically a humorist and optimist, and these goofy, generally life-affirming stories probably portray my natural personality more clearly than any other fictions I've written, which are only "splinters" off my wooden head. The "trailer-park" tag is US slang for lowlifes, poverty-stricken lager louts and chippies. My kind of folks.

NG: "Fractal Paisleys," the volume's title story, is particularly amusing,

and has an especially authentic texture. Does it reflect any particular personal experience of yours?

PDF: The struggle to live an idiosyncratic life in a society that values and enforces homogenous behaviour and thought is something I've endured all my days. That frustration more than anything else propels the stories in *Fractal Paisleys*. So despite their rather glib and comic surface, they all really deal with deep dissatisfactions. Consider "Mama Told Me not to Come," which opens with the narrator's attempted suicide! *Pace It's a Wonderful Life*, I guess I'm the Frank Capra of sf!



NG: Still, *Fractal Paisleys* contains many of the funniest sf stories I've read, reminiscent at times of Henry Kuttner's in their tendency to provoke chaos by introducing some futuristic artefact into the present. What's the foundation – the secret, if you like – of your comic technique?

PDF: Very perceptive, Nicholas! Kuttner too was indeed an admired model, as is the volume's dedicatee, Thorne Smith. I think that you've hit already on the formula: take an engaging loser or freakish person, or an average fellow at some crisis point, then add a fantasy or sf element which allows for the upsetting of consensus reality and hopefully the solution or transformation of the character's dilemma. I have three more stories done in this vein, and

would love to get enough together for another such collection.

NG: *Lost Pages*, your most recent Four Walls volume, assembles pieces that rewrite the history of sf and the biographies of its authors, among other things. What statement or statements are you making about the sf genre here? Are you simply giving its practitioners the opportunity to inhabit their fantasies?

PDF: Alternate history fascinates me, as it obviously does a number of sf writers, and my twist on it was to make the alternate worlds revolve around the personalities and/or fictions of several of my favourite writers. I wanted to do one involving D. H. Lawrence, but never got around to it. Some day....

NG: "The Happy Valley at the End of the World" skilfully evokes the *White Mischief* atmosphere of colonial Kenya, against the backdrop of a universal plague (universal among Europeans, that is) and the ideals of early aviation. All of this reflects the psychology of J. G. Ballard: the decay of a colonial setting (Shanghai, in reality), entropy overtaking imperialism, low-flying aircraft. To what extent is this story, then, a psychoanalysis of Ballard? The narrative's main focus is on Antoine de Saint-Exupery; but is he present merely as the epitome of the world the death of which Ballard has portrayed?

PDF: Your Ballardian exegesis of "The Happy Valley at the End of the World" is spot-on. I can't say definitely why I didn't make the child Ballard into the narrator. Perhaps only because I wanted an adult perspective, and was hooked on Saint-Exupery's gallant and macho character. But since Ballard has gone on record as being transfixed by such adventurers as Mallory the mountaineer, perhaps my choice of such a protagonist was unconsciously apt.

NG: "World Wars Three," also in *Lost Pages*, is an alternate-world Thomas Pynchon pastiche, featuring the famous Pig Bodine. Pig is very much a trailer-park sort of character; have you considered further appropriation of Pynchon's pantheon?

PDF: Writing my novel *Ciphers*, which I've been known to call "a thematic sequel to *Gravity's Rainbow*," pretty much exhausted my fascination with emulating Pynchon directly. I still revere him and look forward to reading his next book, but I doubt that I'll dip my pen into the ink of his literary universe again.

NG: "Instability," another of the liter-

ary capers in *Lost Pages*, is a take on the personalities and values of the Beatniks, written (appropriately) with Rudy Rucker. How much of the story's hallucinogenic hilarity is yours, and how much is Rucker's?

PDF: Although Rudy and I alternated the handling of sequential sections of the story, by the end of the composition process, we had substantially touched up each line together. I think this story and our subsequent collaboration ("The Square Root of Pythagoras") represents a pretty seamless blend of our allied sensibilities. But I acknowledge the full superiority of Rudy's warped imagination.

NG: "Alice, Alfie, Ted, and the Aliens," the concluding tale in *Lost Pages*, is quite a telling summation of the obsessions of writers like, well, James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Sheldon), Alfred Bester and Theodore Sturgeon, but rendered in colours of libidinous transcendence. Are you ever worried about libel suits? (When I mentioned the story's content to a well-known feminist sf critic, she was rather shocked, from what I could gather.)

PDF: If I worried about laws, I'd never have done *Ciphers*, which samples hundreds of pop songs without proper legalities. As far as libel goes, I understand that one cannot libel the dead.

The only living writers in this story are Delany and Le Guin. Chip saw the story in advance and approved. I later heard that Le Guin or her partisans had the opposite reaction. In any case, such a suit would be the definition of publicity I couldn't possibly buy! The only thing I worry about when using real people in fiction is being untrue to their legacy or spirit.

NG: Turning to *Ciphers*: you appeared nude on its cover. What does this say about the book itself?

PDF: Actually, you can see the waistband of my jeans if you look closely. I am merely topless, a distressing enough proposition! I was cajoled into posing this way by a photographer from a local alternative newspaper, and then cavalierly allowed Andy Watson of Cambrian to use the photo. Without much forethought, I suppose I was jumping the "author as celebrity" train, like John Irving posing in wrestler's tights. Still, the photo does reflect a certain nakedness of my thought processes, as embodied in the loony, almost stream-of-consciousness nature of *Ciphers*.

NG: You've become very active as an sf critic and columnist, writing very sympathetic reviews of many items that could be said to fall into the unclassifiable (?) slipstream category. What aes-

thetic spirit guides your criticism?

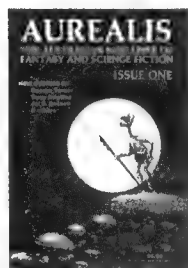
PDF: In choosing books for review, I look for evidence of authenticity, novelty, intelligence, love of literature, craftsmanship, sincerity – genius, even! Basically, I don't want to be bored or disgusted (only shabbiness and meretriciousness bore and disgust me) by a book I have to write about. Getting paid less than minimum wage for reviewing, I feel I may as well enjoy myself rather than suffer! I relish sharing my enthusiasms with the readers of my reviews. In short, I simply prefer to be the middleman for a quality product rather than trash. Tasty home-made sausages, not sawdust-and-nitrate weiners!

NG: Finally: how do you see your career developing from here? What publications lie in your immediate future?

PDF: I have many, many projects within the sf field at various lengths I envision bringing to completion. A steampunk novel, a ribofunk novel, a *Gormenghast*-style fantasy – the list goes on and on. Additionally, I can conceive of several mainstream books I want to tackle, and Mike Bishop and I intend to do a third mystery. More projects than lifetime, perhaps, but better that than the other way around! **[Z]**

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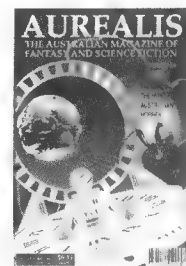
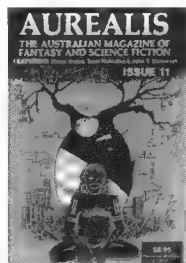
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Late news! In the general year-2000 excitement, I failed to report the major event of 1999: "The world as we know it will cease to exist, as I have stated previously in this volume, on August 18, 1999." (*Criswell Predicts: Your Future from Now to the Year 2000!*, 1968) The things you miss if you let your attention wander for just one day.

THE GAME OF X

Simon R. Green cannot be disbelieved: "I'm also working on my new, guaranteed to be a hit, TV series: *Jesus Christ, Private Eye*. Down these mean streets of Jerusalem a man must go who is more than a man... Every week, Jesus tracks down the bad guys, and forgives them."

Harry Harrison attained the ripe age of 75 on 12 March this year, and will be horribly annoyed if anyone calls him a Grand Old Man.

Laurence James (1942-2000), British author, died on 10 February. As an editor at NEL in the early 70s he was responsible for the first paperback appearances of Stuart Gordon, Christopher Priest, M. John Harrison, and Bob Shaw. From 1975 he became an incredibly prolific writer, publishing a little sf as James (in *New Worlds Quarterly*, and the "Simon Rack" adventure novels) and masses of non-sf under multiple pseudonyms. Christopher Priest: "He was ever such a good man: funny, kind, wise, honest and terrific company. He was a great friend for thirty years. His death is an intense personal blow to everyone who knew him."

Diana Wynne Jones is gobsmacked at being offered vast-seeming piles of yen (not to mention soft toys called Totoro) by famous animé man Hayao Miyazaki, for film rights to *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Terry Pratchett, weary and spent from finalizing his latest Discworld novel *The Truth*, announced luxurious plans to take a break of "about an hour" before embarking on the next one, *Thief of Time*. "I can't be having with this 'one a year' business any more."

Colin Smythe, hero literary agent, grumbles that the one Pratchett title that needed no change for the German edition — *Carpe Jugulum* — has just mysteriously morphed in translation to *Ruhig Blut!*

Roger Vadim (1928-2000), the movie director best known in sf for exposing titillating areas of his then wife Jane Fonda in *Barbarella* (1968), died of cancer on 11 February at age 72. All five of his wives — including Brigitte Bardot — attended the 18 February funeral in Saint-Tropez, France.

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

N. Lee Wood is glad to remain among us after a lengthy struggle with the British government: "At long last, I'm no longer an 'illegal immigrant.' I've been granted a year's visa to remain in the UK and earn my living by writing..."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Clarke Award. Shortlist for 2000: *Time*, Stephen Baxter; *The Bones of Time*, Kathleen Ann Goonan; *Silver Screen*, Justina Robson; *Cryptonomicon*, Neal Stephenson; *Distraction*, Bruce Sterling; *A Deepness in the Sky*, Vernor Vinge. Award presentation in May.

That Was Then, This Is Now. From TVData Features Syndrome listings (NA): "When Daniel Keyes wrote the short story 'Flowers for Algernon' in 1959, it was science fiction. Today, the story of a mentally disabled man who undergoes experimental brain surgery to make him smart is science in the future." A very, very different thing.

Nebula Awards. Novel shortlist for 2000: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents*; Ken MacLeod, *The Cassini Division*; George R. R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings*; Maureen F. McHugh, *Mission Child*; Sean Stewart, *Mockingbird*; Vernor Vinge, *A Deepness in the Sky*. Winner announced in May.

Publishers and Sinners. *SF Age*, the multiply Hugo-nominated US glossy, ceases publication with the May issue. Editor Scott Edelman has already accepted a job outside the genre; the publisher Sovereign Media's other fiction mag *Realms of Fantasy* is so far unaffected. Scott: "The hardest thing for people to understand is that the magazine was still profitable, even at the end, but just not as profitable as any of the other Sovereign titles — the media magazine, the wrestling mag, the log

home and history mags — all way surpassed what *Age* brought in."

Alternate SF. The recent French bestseller *Une education anglaise* by Christian Lehmann (Paris, January 2000) looks like and has been reviewed as autobiography, but plays around somewhat with British sf history. Its author/narrator has an sf-writing uncle called Luther Rohan who lives in Oxford and once feuded with Harlan Ellison. There's a UK Worldcon, Seacon '73 rather than '79 as in reality, at the Brighton Metropole Hotel. Clarke and Leiber are guests. During the event a major professional (Rohan) dies and is eulogized at the awards ceremony, as was John Brunner at the 1995 Worldcon; and there's knowledgeable stuff about convention panels, beer-drinking, auctions, *Star Trek* fans... Christian Lehmann, I remember, attended several 1970s British conventions and is a cousin of Michael Scott Rohan, who then lived in Oxford; apparently Luther Rohan is another joint cousin resident in England, though a lawyer rather than a writer. Is this what they call metafiction?

Small Press. *Light's List 2000* (15th edition) briefly describes over 1,450 small English-language magazines, with contact details. 64pp A5, £2 from Photon Press, 37 The Meadows, Berwick-on-Tweed, TD15 1NY.

Lambda Awards shortlist for 1999 gay/lesbian sf/fantasy: *Minions of the Moon*, Richard Bowes; *Night Shade*, Victoria Brownworth & Judith Redding; *The Annunciate*, Severna Park; *The Gumshoe, the Witch, and the Virtual Corpse*, Keith Hartman; *Through a Brazen Mirror*, Delia Sherman, Courtney Skinner & Ellen Kushner. Winner announced on 1 June.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Arcane Cartography*: "Without waiting for a response, Dan stretched his hand toward Kim and began murmuring sharp, crystalline words. They hung in the air, twisting over and under and around each other like the streets of London..." (Patricia C. Wrede, *Mairelon the Magician*, 1991) *Dept of Beetling Brows*: "... his square chin, weathered skin, and small eyes that never seemed still. They darted up and down her own figure now, Hester thought, like a pair of those black beetles that ran from the light at night if one had reason to go into the nether regions of a house." (Robert Bloch & Andre Norton, *The Jekyll Legacy*, 1990) *Dept of Eyeballs in the Sky*: "They all felt Michael's adrenaline kick in and watched his eyes bounce off his legal pad..." (Rock Brynner, *The Doomsday Report*, 1998)

WE ALL SAW IT

Mat Coward

The plate flew across the room and died the death of a thousand shards against the far wall, missing Mark's head on the way by just a few inches. "There you are," he accused, "you start with one lousy flying saucer and you end up with a whole flying bloody dinner service!"

Typical Mark: ever aware of his famous wit and his precious cool, even when he was getting angry; and maybe, even – after all, I'd never thrown anything at him before – a little scared. "I didn't throw it," I said. "It slipped."

"*Slipped?* Well my God, woman, you must admit that was quite a slip! Olympic standard, I'd say. That plate could slip for Great Britain!"

I pushed past him to pick up the broken bits. "You make me so mad."

"Oh no, love," he said, in his up-and-down Welsh sing-song. "That's something other people can't do for you. You have to do that for yourself."

I'd thrown the plate out of frustration, really, not fury. "Why are you so against it all?" I asked. "That's not very scientific, is it? I mean, we did see what we saw. You can't deny that." And he couldn't. Because we did see what we saw, and he knew it as well as I did.

There were five of us... or four of us, or three of us, depending on who you believe and when you believe them. But to begin with, anyway, there were five of us.

It was 1975. We were all 19, all students at a college of higher education in the rural south-west of England. Mark and I had been going out together for about a year, but we didn't live together. I would have, but he wouldn't, so I never suggested it. Instead I lived in rooms at the college, which I shared with Joany and Natasha. Mark shared a

flat in the local town with Jim, Natasha's boyfriend.

Jim owned a car. It was an old Ford Cortina, a real student's car, which had been ready for the scrapyard when he'd bought it, but now, a few months later, ran as reliably as a digital watch. Jim was studying engineering – "But despite that," he used to say, "I still know how to fix up a motor."

It was just as well he did, because that Cortina was a life-saver. Apart from Mark, who'd grown up in the wilds of north Wales, we were all town-bred, and none of us – including Mark – found the beautiful, peaceful countryside of Gloucestershire much to our liking. When you're 19, you don't want beauty and peace. You want noise and booze and smoke and dangerous flirtations. Jim's wheels at least held out the promise of teenage kicks. We might not actually find excitement, but we were free to search for it; and when you're young and with friends, the hunt can often be more rewarding than the quarry.

The first Saturday of that June was such a beautiful day that even hardened sophisticates like us could see some point to nature. Warm enough for shirt-sleeves, cool enough for style (denim waistcoats, mock-leather bomber jackets), it was the sort of day you might remember forever.

We set off at the first crack of dawn, by which I mean about 10.30am, and just drove. No maps, no schedule, no destination. Just five good mates, lots of cigarettes and rock and roll tapes; and one or two rather pathetic-looking joints, which we took along for the ride, mainly to prove to ourselves that we were who we were: carefree students on a crazy day out.

Natasha was driving – Jim had been giving her lessons – and came in for some teasing because she was careful to drink only moderately. Such a responsible attitude was unheard of in those days, even amongst proper

adults, but then she always was more serious than the rest of us. She spoke openly of “planning a career,” at a time when most of us were still more interested in avoiding the need to get a job. Still, she was a good driver. You always felt safe when Natasha took the wheel, even if you didn’t like to admit it.

We hit the first randomly-arrived-at, picturesque country pub round about opening time, and from then the day disappeared in a pleasurable haze of randomly-arrived-at, picturesque country pubs, one after the other. We played darts and shove-halfpenny, we chatted up the locals, and then we breezed on, in a loving bubble of companionship and freedom. In those days, English pubs were still required to shut for a few hours in the afternoon, even at weekends, so we spent that time in a field somewhere, smoking the joints and not getting high, eating cheese and onion rolls and trying to open beer bottles with our teeth.

By the time we started back, it was nearly midnight. And that was when our perfect day ended.

I think we all saw it at roughly the same time, but it was Jim, sitting in the jam-sandwich seat up front, who exclaimed first. “Christ alive!” he yelled. “Look at that!”

I remember exactly what each of us cried out at that moment.

Natasha: “Shit!”

Mark: “Shit, man!”

Sue (me): “My God!”

Joany: (Nothing. Not a sound).

You couldn’t call it an unidentified flying object, not really. It was all too obviously identifiable. It was a flying saucer, a spaceship, the sort you’d see in a high-budget sf film, hovering clearly in the clear sky, just a few feet – it seemed – above and ahead of us.

No, there was no mistaking what it was. And we all saw it.

“I didn’t see anything,” Joany moaned, for the tenth or hundredth time. “I didn’t see *N-E-Thing*. And I wish you’d all shut up about it.” With that, she struggled up from her bean bag and flung herself out of the room. We didn’t see her again for a week; she went home to her mum and dad, and got them to phone the college claiming she was in bed with an upset stomach. True, probably. She was a very nervy girl.

In her absence, the other three fell about assassinating her with some enthusiasm. I didn’t join in. Not through loyalty – Joany was always the odd one out in our little group, and not only for being manless – but because I was too excited to say anything much.

Natasha was almost as wide-eyed as me. We both kept saying things like: “A flying saucer! I mean, wow, a flying saucer – I can’t believe it!” Jim just kept shaking his head, and going: “Incredible, absolutely incredible.” Mark didn’t say much at all, he just drank. Hard.

We were all pretty drunk. We’d driven straight from our “encounter” to the boys’ flat, and immediately got down to getting some cider inside us. Not that sweet stuff they sell in bottles, but rough country cider, genuine scrumpy, which only the very young or the very old can

drink without throwing up. Tasted like petrol, smelled like cat’s piss, and you could feel it doing you good all the way down.

The conversation went in circles; very small circles, consisting chiefly of astonished exclamations. Only Mark kept quiet, and only Joany denied us, a lot more than thrice, before the cock crew that morning. “I don’t know what you’re on about,” she’d said, over and over. “I couldn’t see anything where you were all pointing. I don’t know what you’re getting so excited about.”

Which was a lie. She’d seen it. I’d *seen* her seeing it. For Christ’s sake, we all saw it. We did.

My argument with Mark began when Jim and Natasha finally went off to the only bedroom to crash out, leaving us alone in the living-room. He was finishing off the scrumpy, I was sipping black coffee.

I curled my legs up on the sofa, rested my head in his lap, and said: “Wasn’t it incredible? Wonderful. But frightening as well. Didn’t you feel that?”

“No,” he grunted. “It was just nothing. Not worth talking about. You understand? Just nothing.”

Understand? Of course I didn’t understand! I could sort of understand Joany refusing to believe she’d seen it, but Mark wasn’t pretending nothing had happened. He was saying: Yes, we saw a spaceship, so what? Let’s have another drink.

We were supposed to be scientists, he and I. Science students, anyway. How could scientists not be fascinated by such an experience? Not want – need – to find out what it meant?

The row crackled on all week, culminating in the plate that slipped for Great Britain. Finally, then, he explained.

“You’ve not met my parents, have you?” He knew perfectly well I hadn’t, but the Welsh can never resist narrative structure. I didn’t answer. “Well, you might meet my mam some day, but you’ll never have the pleasure with my father. He’s dead.” Brief pause for a gulp of cider, then on with the tale.

“1961, right? That’s not when he died, that’s when he began to die. That’s when he saw a saucer in broad daylight. Or broad dusk, anyway. He was cycling home to the village from work, pedalling along the river bank, and he saw a flying saucer.”

“Mark, you’re kidding! What was it like?”

“No idea. He never told me.”

“He never *told* you?” What was this – an hereditary disease?

“He never talked about it. He just wasn’t interested. Truth is, my dad wasn’t interested in anything much. Wasn’t interested in me, wasn’t interested in my sister, wasn’t interested in Ma. But you couldn’t really hold it against him, because most of all, he wasn’t interested in himself. This is a man who worked at the same railway station his whole life, from the age of 15; who never went out, had no hobbies or interests, never went to a union meeting. I don’t suppose he ever voted. He’d just go to work, come home, have his tea. I mean, God knows how he ever managed to have children, let alone get married. Still, some women go for that, don’t they? The appeal of the zom-

bie. Anyway, he certainly wasn't interested in flying saucers. He must have heard of them. Although he didn't go to the pictures, or read books, he must have at least glanced at the newspaper at work during his tea breaks."

"So that's why he didn't talk about it? He simply wasn't interested?"

"Partly. It's also what happened later. The silly sod went and reported what he'd seen. He didn't care tuppence for the saucer, but he knew that was what you were supposed to do." Mark laughed. "I remember he was annoyed because it made him late for his tea. Anyway, he went into the police station in the village, filled in a form, and then came home. Now, here's the thing." Mark lit a cigarette, the last in the packet.

"My dad had just seen a flying saucer, clearly enough for him to have no doubts that that was what he'd seen, but he came home, told Mum, 'Sorry I'm late, it couldn't be helped, have you saved me some tea?' You know, as if perhaps she might *not* have done, because he was so bloody insignificant! And then he sat down and had his tea without ever mentioning the saucer."

"So how did you find out?"

"He started keeping a diary. He got – I dunno, visits. Because he'd reported it, presumably."

"Visits?"

"Government, I suppose. Men in black cars, wearing black clothes. Came to see him at work, once or twice they caught up with him on the way home, took him for a ride, talked to him. I think it sort of outraged them that he showed so little interest. I've read a lot on this since – you know, since he died and that – and I think people are supposed to become paranoid, obsessive, talkative. Accuse the authorities of a cover-up and so on. But not my dad. Not him! He just wasn't interested. I don't think they knew how to deal with him. These men in black, whoever they were." Mark scratched at his stubbly beard. "Anyway, he was dead five years later, and it turned out he'd kept this diary, recording all the visits and phone calls and everything else."

"So in the end he must have been at least a little bit interested?"

Mark shook his head. "No. No, I don't think so. It's just that towards the end he became convinced they were going to kill him, and he had some idea that this would rob his widow of the life insurance. Some scheme he was in with the union. He didn't care about much, my dad, but he didn't like being cheated."

I shivered. "They'd didn't kill him, did they? The men in the black cars?"

Mark grinned round his cigarette; a soldier's gesture, I remember thinking. "No, no. He died of a heart attack. Still – wouldn't have died if it wasn't for seeing that damn thing, though. I'm sure of that."

Joany reappeared the next day, a Sunday.

At first I thought she was either stoned or hysterical, but I gradually realized she was both. She had long, fair, wispy hair, and very fair skin which reddened when she was excited. She wore the sort of *groovy* clothes that had been fashionable a few years earlier. She –

She was a very irritating person when she was enthusiastic about something. As she was now: enthusiastic about the UFO. She didn't seem to remember having denied seeing it, now that she was full of it. This was to become a pattern. Years later, when she was back to not having seen it, and I would insist on talking to her about it, she would become sulky and her mouth would close up and quiver and she would look as if she was on the verge of tears. She wouldn't say anything, wouldn't even try to change the subject: just wait for me to give up, and go.

Looking back, I can almost believe that she was lying about seeing it, just as much as she had lied, and would later lie, about not having seen it. As if, for her, subjectively, there was no truth left in the matter, one way or the other.

Mark and I talked about it a lot in those early days of the rest of our lives. He couldn't resist conversation, that was his nature, but he would only talk about *it* to explain why it wasn't worth talking about.

He was vehemently in favour of forgetting the whole thing. This was him that autumn:

"Look, love, I'm interested in *things*, yeah? The world, science, life, literature, music. Rugby football, drink and drugs, and what pretty girls wear under their pyjamas. Lots of things. I am not going to let my life be dominated by this one thing in which I am *not* interested."

I couldn't take that. He was saying, Yes we saw it, but we can never know what it meant, so forget it.

Another time Mark tried to explain to me what he didn't feel, was just before I saw him for the last time. Or nearly the last time – I can't remember which. We weren't close enough by then for such details to have significance.

"I spent years reading up on this crap, girl, after my dad died. And I mean *years*. And the only place it ever got me was to the realization that no one will ever know the truth of UFOs, even supposing there's a truth to be known, and that if you spend your life trying to you'll just die of frustration. You'll go mad."

These were monologues by now, not conversations, so I said nothing. I just sat there smoking, wishing he'd leave so I could go to bed.

"Nobody ever does find out, you know? They think they do, but all they end up with is some loopy, paranoid theory that a ten-year-old kid could shred the logic out of in two minutes flat. Well, lovey, not for me! You hear? You do what you want, but my place at this college, the life that's opening up for me, was hard bloody won and I'm not chucking it away. Why should I? Just because my poor old dad saw something meaningless one day, and then years later I saw something else meaningless?"

Meaningless! That was the whole point, for me: events have meaning. Meaning exists to be mined. But I just smoked, said goodnight, pecked him on the cheek as he left.

We were all in the same year at college. We all left on the same day. And before we went our ways, I insisted that we have one last drink together, in the boys' flat. I had to insist, to make a big deal out of it, because they all knew what I wanted to talk about.

Just for the record. I was sure we'd never all be in the same room again at one time – unless one of us was being buried, perhaps – so, just for the record, I wanted us to part with this thing still existing between us. I didn't want it to dissolve; I wanted us each to take it away whole.

And, just for the record, each of us that day agreed that we had seen what we had seen. We agreed on little else.

My view in those days was simply that if a thing is real, then there must be a truth attached to it which can be uncovered by scientific method. That was our scientific faith. So how could Mark have a life-changing event and just shrug it off? It was impossible, I decided. He wouldn't be able to maintain it. He was fooling himself. I knew that I would never be the same again.

"That's what none of you lot understand," Mark said, around the time of the plate-throwing. "Religious, political, ufological... none of you zealots understand that not everybody is turned on by the same thing." He turned to me. I don't remember which of the others were there, or where we were. "Look, Sue, you're an atheist, right? You're not an escapee from Catholicism, not a refugee from a communion chain gang. You're not a member of some branch of very liberal reform Jewry, huh? You're just a solid, honest-to-god atheist. Now if someone who wasn't an atheist, just some lapsed believer, an agnostic, met an angel on their way home from the supermarket one day, it would change their lives, *define* their lives. But you, you could sit next to Christ on a bus and it wouldn't make any difference to you, am I right? See? Because you're just not interested in God, the same way you're just not interested in cricket. Right? Well, love, that's how I feel about little green men. I just don't give a toss."

I understood what he meant, I just didn't understand what he was saying. So I was nasty. I said: "You're a lot like your dad, aren't you?"

He laughed, and I've never forgotten that laugh. "Let's hope not," he said. "I'm Mark Two, improved model, learning from the design faults of the first."

Joany, for a time, was convinced that it was significant that both Mark and his father had seen a UFO. "It's a message. It must be."

Mark snorted. "*Millions* of people have seen them, girl! Millions! Over hundreds of generations. Pilots, policemen, politicians, pimps. Thousands of people at once, sometimes. Me and my dad, it's just coincidence. I'm a Celt, for Christ's sake. I know how cruel coincidence can be."

Jim, within weeks, had wholeheartedly adopted the conspiracy scenario: "The governments know all about it. They're covering it up."

He'd been given two milk crates full of UFO books by Mark that Mark said he'd never got round to chucking out. "Yes, you can bloody well have them, mate! Have them, take them, keep them, and if you've any bloody sense, burn them." I wish Jim had burned them. I wish *Mark* had burned them.

Jim took to saying things in a very quiet voice, as if inaudibility might make them harder to argue against.

"You know that up until the late 1950s, extraterrestrial craft weren't considered loony or laughable. It was taken for granted that they were what they seemed, and most people, including scientists, were openly and seriously interested in them. Did you know that? In the early 50s, most sane, normal people expected contact to be made imminently. It's the greatest propaganda triumph in history: instead of denying the saucers, the authorities simply turned them into a joke."

"All true, old son," said Mark, who used to switch, ostentatiously, from cider to vodka whenever Jim started whispering. "But now you need to apply to the fruits of your scholarship the three most important words in the whole of philosophy: So Fucking What?"

More than 20 years later I bumped into Natasha, at a book launch in London.

Not true to say I bumped into her; I'd gone because I knew she'd be there. She was one of the contributors to the book that was being launched (some deadly, quasi-academic thing about welfare reform), and I was able to get an invitation easily enough. By then I was working in publishing, had been for years, at a very lowly level. Checking facts for school text books. It's as dull as it sounds.

"Susan? Good Lord, yes, of *course* I remember you! How are you?"

The way she said it, after I'd corralled her into a corner with a tray of canapés and introduced myself, was intended to suggest that she was being politely dishonest; that she did not, in fact, remember me. But her lie was a lie. Of course she remembered me.

I couldn't think of any small talk. My life was not one which contained an especially rich fund of smallness. I could have chosen to go along with her faked politeness, her opportunistic amnesia. Could have asked her what it was like to be an MP; she was one of that hideous, hard-as-nails, red-suited, shoulder-padded brigade of nannies that had come to rule over us. "The Aliens," as one newspaper satirist always called them.

But politicians are used to extricating themselves from bores at parties, and I knew she'd be off within the minute if I didn't say something to hold her. So I said: "What do you think, now, about that flying saucer we saw in 1975?"

Quick calculations flashed between the centres of her eyes and the corners of her mouth.

Natasha put a hand on my elbow, and the other hand over her mouth. She bent her knees slightly and giggled. She was performing a mime called *Girly*, all about how to grasp the levers of power without losing your inner femininity.

"Oh, God!" she said, stage whispering to flatter me with her intimacy. "God, yes, I do remember that!" I hadn't asked if she remembered it. Of course she bloody remembered it. We all did. "My God, Susan, I haven't thought of that in years! What had we all been drinking that night? Or..." She made a naughty face, and a puff-puff gesture with an imaginary joint. "Or should I say, what had we been *inhaling*?"

She put a *shhh* finger to her lips as she began to ease

past me, back into the room. "Oh dear, we did have our laughs, didn't we? Look, Susan, great to see you after all this time. Gotta mingle, I'm afraid, but listen, we should get together one night, girls' night out, bit of female bonding, yah? I'll ring you, OK?"

She didn't ask for my phone number, my address, my occupation, or even whether my surname had changed. I never saw Natasha again. Not in the flesh. I bet I could have been an MP, if that's what I'd gone for. Bet I'd have made a better one than Natasha.

I didn't go to Natasha's funeral, but I went to Mark's. He died in 1979, the day after Mrs Thatcher got elected for the first time. He was enormously drunk at the moment of his death, which occurred when he fell off a platform on the Northern Line and was run over by a train. A newspaper reported, as if it were a fact, that he had been celebrating the election result. Jim and I almost laughed at that.

Jim could not be shaken from his belief that Mark had been bumped off, silenced because he knew too much, by the "Men in Black." I was tired of arguing with him, so instead I married him. I thought it might shut him up, which it did to some extent, and in any case it seemed a practical solution in various ways. It was a sobering moment for both of us, our wedding in that almost empty registry office. It was the moment at which we both accepted that, like those irredeemably twisted from the norm by membership of an extreme religious sect, we could never "marry out."

"It's just like JFK," Mark said, at one point. "Any open-minded study of the available evidence reveals proof beyond reasonable doubt that there has been a cover-up –"

"Well, then," said Jim, but Mark held out a palm for silence and crushed his eyes shut as if against a migraine.

"No, listen," he said. "A cover-up took place, yes. The UFO phenomenon, whatever it is or isn't, continues to be the subject of a cover-up. Yes. But you see, to prove a cover-up is not to prove *what* was covered up. You understand?"

Jim shook his head, refusing to understand, not wanting to hear.

Mark lit another fag. "You see what I mean, don't you Sue? I mean, Christ alive, given the reflex paranoia of all authorities throughout human history, to prove a cover-up is not even the same thing as proving that there was ever anything at all worth covering up! Those types, hell, they'd cover up their own breakfast menus, and think it a good day's work!"

I'd given up going to funerals by the time Natasha died, but even if I hadn't I don't think I'd have been welcome at hers.

It wasn't me that told the *Sunday Mirror* about the rising-star MP's "Amazing UFO Encounter." It was Jim, of course. But it was my fault; when I got home from my last meeting with her I was so angry, so bloody humiliated... If we'd been an ordinary couple, a real couple, you could have said he did it for me. As revenge for the way Natasha had snubbed me.

Her death wasn't my fault, though. I insist on that.

Such a brief, minor sensation would not have damaged any other politician – one with nothing to hide, nothing to feel ashamed of. Besides, it's not as if she committed suicide. She died of a brain tumour. That can happen to anyone, even people with bright futures.

If it was the newspaper story that brought on the stress that triggered her death (and I don't say it was), then the source of the stress lay within her. To live a lie we must eat our own past. To do that is to run a risk of choking.

Jim attended Natasha's funeral, made a fool of himself, lost his job. From then on, he spent all his waking hours on the Internet, a full-time UFO nut. For a long time, he was more interested in the "conspiracy" itself, it seemed to me, than in the meat it wrapped.

He pretended to be an alcoholic, when he remembered. He wasn't very good at it. It was part of a strategy of bullying, aimed at persuading me to pay for him to attend UFO conventions in America. I ignored him. I looked after him, as best I could, but I ignored him.

I shan't mention Jim again. We are still together, in a locational sense at least, but all we have between us, naturally, is the sharing of that one experience. And even there we are so far apart.

If it had not happened, and we had remained friends of the kind who meet up once a year or so to reminisce, we would have been closer than we are. Of the five of us, only Jim and I ever married. And we only married each other.

I still love Mark, of course. Even if he were still alive, I think I would still love him.

Joany searches for the truth. Ah, no – don't let me tease you! Not that truth, not our truth. I mean, Joany searches for The Truth.TM She has been an astrologer, a healer of auras, an Arthurian, a feminist, a Jungian. She has taken (but never completed) instruction in Roman Catholicism, Judaism and Islam. She even joined the Church of England once, which must have given some poor agnostic vicar a nasty few weeks.

Joany practices serial spiritual monogamy. She weds each truth in turn, is utterly faithful to it, and is always shocked and shattered by the inevitable divorce.

She will hardly talk to me these days. I ring her once a month, as I have done every month for more than 20 years (except when she gave up telephones because they cause cancer), but she has nothing to say to me.

I can hear her at the other end of the line, swallowing nervously. She knows that sooner or later – sooner, in fact, given that we have nothing else in common – I will start to talk about *it*.

But how could I not? To pretend the past never happened – *that's* insanity.

From the beginning, if I'm honest (which I think is what I'm being with myself now, though you can never tell), I felt attracted by Mark's insistence that what we saw didn't matter. Deep down I agreed with him, you see, but I also knew he was wrong.

It's taken me years to find the two ends of that paradox, and tie them together. The result is scepticism. Rigorous,

meticulous scepticism. Mark's approach to the UFO – well, you couldn't call it an approach, because he was retreating. He wasn't sceptical, he was cynical, and cynicism is invariably born out of fear. Not a fear, I don't mean, of the thing itself, or even of the experience; but a fear of allowing it to matter, to the exclusion of other things which he wanted to believe were more important – even though he knew they weren't.

Which is almost an exact definition of cowardice, if you think about it.

Over the years, I have managed to isolate and excise the fear from Mark's cynicism, to leave behind the great sceptical truth which it hid. My one great conclusion: that conclusions simply don't matter, that significance has no significance. That results are nothing, and process is everything. That truths are more important than truth.

I laugh sometimes, when I think what a tiny minority we true sceptics are on the Earth. We're almost a cult! An anti-cult.

Joany said a terrible thing to me when I rang her this week. I'm used to her saying nothing happened, or it was all our imagination, or, most irritatingly meaningless of all, "*It was all a long time ago, Sue.*" Recently she has been adopting Natasha's post-*Sunday Mirror* line: "It was all a harmless student joke. I can't understand why Sue and Jim are still so obsessed with it."

But this week. Terrible.

"Look, Sue, I've been thinking about this, and you know, I've been really wracking my brains, and – well, you know what I think? I don't even think I was even there that night. I think that's why there's all this mix-up, you know, because, well, I think it was some other girl you're thinking of. Sue...?"

"I'm still here, Joany."

"Right. Well, what do you think? Because, when you think about it, and I don't mean this nasty, but I was never really part of your crowd, was I? So maybe it was some other girl."

She never was really part of our crowd, she's right about that. I'd have forgotten her name by now, if things had been different.

Jim (I said I wouldn't mention him again, but after all who else do I have to talk about?) lived for years in the hope that "they'll make themselves known." That way, he believed, we would be vindicated. We would no longer be mad, we would no longer be obsessive, we would no longer be outsiders. But in my view he was talking not about what we would be or not be – but merely about how we would appear to be. A fool is a fool, I say, even when he's right. His condition is not determined by any external reality.

Jim longed for proof. I dreaded the same thing. If it's all true, I couldn't help but feel, then what has all this been for? To live in pursuit of a noble chimera is one thing. But to waste your life screaming "The world is round!" and then to live into an age when all the world says "Of course the world is round. So what?" – I couldn't take that.

There's no such verdict as accidental suicide, not in a coroner's court, but that's what Mark's death was. I miss him, but I know I couldn't have helped him. The only thing I really regret is throwing that plate at him. It *was* thrown, of course; plates don't really slip, not with such force, such integrity of trajectory. Motion is governed by laws, you see.

I'm sorry I threw a plate at him. He would never have done anything like that to me. He'd have died first.

There was a moment, once – it lasted a few weeks – when there was a tenderness between me and Jim, as there might be between freely chosen spouses; a moment when I nursed him, as a wife might nurse a husband.

"You believe there is nothing mystical in the universe," he said, quicksanding into one of the depressions which periodically engulfed him. "You believe there is nothing in our lives which is beyond human explanation." He meant it as an accusation.

"Anything which exists is real," I replied. "And anything which is not real does not exist." I spoke like a character from a nursery rhyme, or a riddler, hoping to produce a soothing, childlike song which might take him to a calmer place within himself.

I meant that if something exists, it is by definition subject to the laws of reality, whether or not those laws are understood by us. Therefore there can be nothing which is "supernatural," since the word, for a true materialist, can have no meaning. This, it seems to me, is the pure heart of the materialist philosophy; it rules out nothing, only disallowing that which, *within its own terms*, cannot exist.

Jim was calm for a week. He slept, listened to the radio, ate soup which I made for him. But when he arose from his bed again, his torment had undergone a metamorphosis – one which I had fed and whelped.

Jim is now the UK editor of a Minnesota-based on-line magazine called *UFO New Skeptic*, which has as its mission "The liberation of the gullible from enslavement by the glib."

Jim names me in his articles for the magazine. There never was a sighting, he writes, only "a group dynamic manipulated by the overbearing presence of a dominant but diseased personality." The UFO phenomenon, he argues, in accord with the dogma of *UFO New Skeptic*, is not of a physical nature – i.e. the unidentified object itself – but is properly a psychological study of the relationship, fundamental to human society, between the leader and the led. The magazine offers advice and counselling to "sheep wishing to flee the flock."

He names me in his articles, but he calls me by my maiden name. He does not name me as his wife, and we still live together. We are still married, and I still cook for him. If I didn't, he would starve.

I loved Mark. The others were my friends, but I can't defend them.

That's not to say I can't make a case for their defence – only that having made such a case, I can very easily dismiss it.

All of our lives, the histories of the five of us, were determined by what we all saw. Of course! We saw some-

thing, we knew something, that is at once beyond the allowable corpus of a civilization's knowledge, and at the same time the absolute embodiment of an era's yearning. We knew for certain something that everyone else wonders about. And so the architecture of the rest of our lives was erected from a design in which we had no say. I accept that.

But – and this is where the case for the defence is so weak, so ill-thought-out – every other living being in this universe could say *exactly the same*. None of us can control random events. I am back to the meaning of words here, because clearly if we could control random events they would not be random.

One man is born in a poor country, and spends his life in poverty. Another man gets in a car on a beautiful afternoon of youth and friendship and experiences something which he is never subsequently able to incorporate into the rest of his life. But that's where he goes wrong, you see: in thinking that there is a "rest" of his life, which is anything other than the sum of its parts. All of its parts.

None of us chooses what happens to us. But sometimes we may have a choice of reaction to what happens.

That's why I'm still here.

Mark chose to be uninterested in the one thing in the world which interested him more than anything else. That killed him. Natasha chose to cut her heart out and attempt to live without it. That killed her. Jim demanded answers, as if we are born with a right to answers. He

found that there are always more answers than questions. It left him as dependent as a fish in a bowl. His life is devoid of comforts. Joany chose to be interested in *everything*, but never for very long. She is, I would say, the unhappiest person I have ever met.

After 20 years I have at last succeeded in resisting the temptation to believe in anything, except that I saw what I saw. That we all saw what we all saw. Beyond that, I read, I study, I evaluate. I accept, but I do not believe.

The difference between me and the others is that the unbearable burden of certainty has killed them all. Whereas I have achieved a liberation, lit by my love of Mark and upheld by a deliberate and systematic and carefully maintained uncertainty.

We all saw it. We all did. But only I survived it.

Mat Coward makes his *Interzone* fiction debut with the above piece, although he once contributed some crime-fiction reviews to these pages (and to our late sister magazine, *Million*). Born in 1960, he is the author of more than 30 published stories which have appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and elsewhere. His first novel is forthcoming in the USA in 2000. He lives in Frome, Somerset, where, among his many other activities, he is editor of the twice-yearly fiction magazine *Crimewave* (excellently produced by publisher Andy Cox).

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The first question would appear to require less than 20 words, not 2,000: "A science fiction magazine is a magazine that publishes science fiction stories." Yet there must be more to it than that, since science fiction magazines do not list their contents on page one, begin the first story on page two, and carry on exclusively with fiction until the final story ends on the final page. One exception comes to mind, the short-lived *Crank!*, but if you have never seen or heard of *Crank!*, that in a way makes my point: having a science fiction magazine that features science fiction stories and *only* science fiction stories has never been a formula for success.

Looking at the science fiction magazines that have endured, and disregarding the inevitable clutter of advertisements, one always finds other ingredients therein. Some of these qualify as forms of science fiction, such as science fiction art – ranging from lush cover paintings to dynamic interior drawings – which is usually considered essential. Occasionally editors will include science fiction jokes, science fiction puzzles, science fiction cartoons, and (don't ask me why) science fiction poetry. There were experiments with science fiction comic strips, even a magazine with an inserted science fiction comic book, and attached CD-ROMs with science fiction computer-game demos will surely be tried someday (if they haven't been tried already).

But other common elements cannot be considered science fiction by any standard definition. Science articles, sometimes including photographs, tables and schematic diagrams. Articles about, or interviews with, noteworthy science fiction writers. Editorials, ranging from brief promotional blurbs to John W. Campbell, Jr.'s infamously long-winded and pugnacious commentaries. Readers' letters, often followed by editors' replies. Reviews of new books, films, and television programmes. Classified ads aimed at science fiction fans and collectors. News reports on the activities of the science fiction community, which started with "The Science Fiction League" section of Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* in the 1930s and continued on to today's "Ansible Link." Even ("don't ask me why," you say?) opinionated columns.

As it happens, my own, non-standard definition of science fiction would incorporate all these materials, largely on the grounds that they seem so wedded to science fiction as to be virtually part of the genre; however, while I am one of their creators, I freely acknowledge that they are only of secondary importance.

The factor that unifies *all* readers of a science fiction magazine is their desire to read stories; only *some* of them want to read editorials, or reviews, or letters, or science articles. Still, though their numbers are smaller, devotees are

WHAT IS A SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE?

AND WHY ON EARTH ARE THEY STILL AROUND?

intensely loyal to their favourite feature, and if a magazine fails to provide it, editors will be bombarded with complaints.

At first, the science-obsessed Gernsback surprisingly did not publish science articles in his science fiction magazines, but he later relented in response to many requests. Even the stubbornest of institutional wills may be bent by recurring demands for a certain feature; for over 50 years, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* has steadfastly refused to include a letters column, but editor Gordon Van Gelder recently started posting some letters on his magazine's website, and one of them – from veteran author William Tenn (Philip Klass), no less – presented a predictable proposal: "I still think – as I always have – that it would be valuable to print a small letters department in *F&SF*..."

What all these features reflect, and to an extent replicate, is the characteristic ambience of a science fiction convention, where one may find: booths or speakers

representing science-oriented organizations like the L-5 Society; science fiction authors offering readings or answering fans' questions as they sign books; large exhibits of science fiction art to admire or purchase; rooms full of dealers selling science fiction books, magazines and memorabilia; and plenty of heated arguments about science fiction during formal panel discussions and informal hotel-room parties. Like conventions, magazines have served as the water-holes of science fiction, where devotees gather not only to enjoy the latest stories from old masters and rising stars, but also to sample its associated products and overhear another small portion of the fascinating extended conversation that has accompanied science fiction since it emerged as a genre.

Therefore, I suggest an alternative answer to my first question: "Science fiction magazines are the written equivalents of science fiction conventions" – and we are well on our way to answering that second question.

Many commentators today regard science fiction magazines as an endangered species, apparently with good reason. After all, we have just witnessed the recent death of *Science Fiction Age*, joining other defunct enterprises of the last decade like the aforementioned *Crank!*, *Odyssey*, *Tomorrow SF*, *Pulphouse*, and *Omni* (although *Omni*, by my definition, was not really a science fiction magazine, despite its stories, because it did not offer the characteristic range of features associated with science fiction magazines – which could explain why the science fiction community was unexpectedly undisturbed by its demise).

Other magazines, like *Aboriginal SF*, are hanging on by a thread, and even the hardy perennials like *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* and *Interzone* never seem to be doing quite well enough to put a smile on their editors' faces.

Still, the species obstinately refuses to die, as old survivors and brash upstarts continue their struggle for survival. A recent issue of *The Bulletin of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America* listed almost 50 current magazines paying at least one cent a word for science fiction and fantasy stories; I don't see how some of these magazines pay their bills, but somehow they are staying afloat. Even as I speak, some prominent figure in the field with better things to do is trying to persuade a major publisher to back her proposed new science fiction magazine, while some poor fool of lesser renown has just spent her recent inheritance producing the first issue of a brand-new science fiction magazine, hoping to find a niche and collect enough subscriptions to pay for a second issue.

Gary Westfahl

It's hard to argue that all this activity reflects only a widespread desire to write and read science fiction, since there are many companies publishing innumerable science fiction books, including some anthologies of original stories, and they are enlisting new authors all the time. The manifestos that launch new magazines may proclaim a passionate desire to showcase and foster innovative, controversial, cutting-edge science fiction of the sort that mainstream publishers would never touch, but the same worthwhile goals might logically be addressed by establishing a small press to publish innovative, controversial, cutting-edge books. Why do these noble aspirations so often manifest themselves in new *magazines*?

The conclusion is inescapable: editors and readers do not simply cherish *science fiction* of certain sorts, but they cherish *science fiction magazines*. They want great stories first and foremost, but they also want the artwork, articles, reviews, editorials, letters and so on. Publishers and editors want to play host to their own, ersatz science fiction conventions, and readers want those ersatz conventions delivered to their homes on a regular basis. In defiance of economic logic, the science fiction community is engaged in an ongoing collective effort to maintain the institution of the science fiction magazine at whatever cost. Rather than extrapolating the curves to make depressing predictions about the imminent death of the science fiction magazine, then, we should rather be astounded by its stubborn vitality – especially in contrast to the near-disappearance of the other varieties of fiction magazines.

Decades ago, there were literally hundreds, if not thousands, of magazines that specialized in or published some fiction; today, these magazines are becoming harder and harder to find. If one considers today's numbers as a percentage of yesterday's numbers, the decline in general fiction magazines surely is more precipitous than the decline in science fiction magazines.

If asked to account for this decline, I might point to the changing nature of the typical reading experience. During the last century, reading became an ideal activity for people on the go; they read while riding to work on the bus, read while sitting in doctors' offices or airport terminals, and read while resting on a park bench awaiting a friend's arrival. And something portable, episodic, and disposable, like a fiction magazine, was ideal for this sort of peripatetic reading. Today, however, people increasingly listen to their Walkmans while on the bus, watch television in doctors' offices and airport terminals, and chatter away on cell phones while awaiting a friend's arrival.

Although many people do continue to read, their reading has evolved into more

of a planned, even ritualized activity. At the end of a busy day, they get a glass of wine or cup of tea, pick up their favourite reading material, and settle into their easy chairs for a few hours of quality reading. Or when they go on vacation, they take something along for long hours of reading while resting by the pool or on the beach. At these times, they don't want or need something portable, episodic and disposable like a magazine; rather, they want something weightier, more cohesive, and more durable – something more suitable for the gravitas of their reading experience. In short, they want a hardcover book; and though other factors are involved, this is undoubtedly one reason why sales of hardcover books remain strong, while sales of their more fragile cousins – like magazines, paperbacks, comic books and newspapers – keep plummeting.

And why have science fiction magazines resisted this trend? I theorize that

Like conventions, magazines have served as the waterholes of science fiction...

the readers of other forms of fiction historically regarded the magazines as ephemeral products to read in a casual manner and throw away after reading; and, now that their manner of reading has grown more scheduled and more bourgeois, they no longer want to bother with such low-class material. But science fiction readers, as indicated, have always felt a special commitment to science fiction magazines that extends beyond their basic commitment to science fiction itself. As embodiments of the entire experience of being part of the science fiction community, science fiction magazines have always been treasured by their purchasers; even in the 1920s and 1930s, when science fiction magazines were in their infancy, fans were already building their private collections, buying every new magazine that appeared on the stands and searching through used book stores for past issues they were missing. Today, all types of fiction magazines may

be eagerly collected, but *first-time purchasers* of science fiction magazines, I submit, have tended to save and collect their magazines more so than first-time purchasers of other fiction magazines.

In this way, science fiction magazines have escaped the aura of proletarian disposability that has contributed to the disappearance of many other, seemingly comparable, fiction magazines in other fields – with some exceptions, of course; *The New Yorker* endures, and no one would consider it a low-class operation! Still, a lover of detective fiction, about to settle down for an afternoon of serious reading, may feel that a hardcover novel, not the latest issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, is the only product that matches the dignity of the occasion. But to a science fiction reader, the latest issue of *Interzone* – or *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Analog* or *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* – is every bit as important, every bit as dignified, as a hardcover novel. The science fiction fan peruses her magazine respectfully and carefully, so as not to bend the pages or break its spine, because she views that magazine, despite its fragility and eclecticism, as a worthwhile addition to her permanent collection and a sentimentally appealing gestalt representing everything that she loves about the genre.

In sum, my brief answer to the second question would be: "they are still around because science fiction readers uniquely value, and uniquely seek to preserve and maintain, their written equivalents of science fiction conventions."

At a time when the entire publishing industry is regularly in turmoil, and when the Internet is poised to revolutionize everything about the way people read, it may seem quaint or reactionary to cling so tenaciously to an ancient medium like the magazine. Yet science fiction should be committed to progress in the truest sense of the word – which doesn't mean constantly replacing the old with the new, but rather means improving what doesn't work while holding on to what works. And, considering how the magazines have helped science fiction grow from a tiny backwater into a major force in the publishing world, and how they have helped to preserve the genre's distinctive identity in the face of innumerable threats, one has to conclude that the magazines represent something that works, and thus something worth keeping.

And so, just as Harlan Ellison still chooses to communicate – and create his new worlds – by means of his old-fashioned manual typewriter, the science fiction community still chooses to communicate – and continually reaffirm, renew and recreate itself – by means of its old-fashioned magazines. Call me a Luddite, but I can't see this as a problem.

Gary Westfahl

THE CONE

Zoran Zivkovic

I didn't come out of the clouds until I was almost at the top of the Cone.

Although it was the middle of summer, Dark Mountain seemed buried in autumn. Down in the valley this was just an ordinary overcast day, probably muggy and humid, but here at an elevation of almost 2,000 metres everything was clothed in a greyness that was less transparent than mist and somehow denser and more palpable. The sky literally touched the ground right here. The clouds were filled with minute drops, embryos of rain, that seemed to be moving in all directions, not just downward. If the temperature were to fall by just a few degrees, they would turn into crystals of snow. This actually happened now and then, though they always quickly reverted. During the summer on Dark Mountain you could go through all four seasons in one day.

In such weather it was not advisable to take long walks since you could easily lose your way. If they went out at all, people stayed close to the hotel, keeping to the asphalt paths where the lighting was on, even though it was just past noon. But I was not afraid of getting lost. I'd been coming to Dark Mountain for years, both summer and winter, and not a day would go by without a visit to the Cone. I was certain that I could find my way there even on a moonless night, though I'd never tried.

The Cone was a projection on the western slope, about two and a half kilometres from the hotel. The view from its peak was almost as fascinating as the one from the topmost craggy crest of Dark Mountain, accessible only to fully equipped mountain climbers. Owing to the Cone's almost perfect shape, from which it derived its name, it seemed to be artificially planted there. As you approached, it didn't give the impression of being steep,

but it was. The climb to the top thus required not only agility but considerable effort as well, even though the distance to be covered was less than 150 metres.

These difficulties discouraged most of the hotel guests from visiting the Cone. On nice days they would walk to its foot, but only a rare few would decide to undertake the climb. In any case, the small, windy plateau at the top only had room for three or four people at most. When the weather was bad, like today's, I could count on the Cone being all mine.

I came out of the cloud all of a sudden. I wasn't far from the top when it started to get lighter. The greyness around me did not get thinner or become more transparent, it just changed shade, turning a bright white. And then I suddenly rose above the foggy mass, squinting at the blinding radiance of the sun.

I stopped, still in the cloud from my waist down, and waited for my eyes to adjust. Above me stretched the immeasurable, bright blue firmament, and as far as I could see below me was a motionless sea, its uniformity disturbed here and there by the islands of mountain peaks similar to the one I had just reached, forming a scattered archipelago in the sky. This panorama was worth all the trouble of the climb.

"Strange to find yourself above the clouds, isn't it?"

I started at the unexpected sound of the voice. I'd been so certain that I would be the only one at the top of the Cone that I hadn't even turned to look around, fixing my eyes on the horizon instead. The man was sitting on a rocky outcropping, his back turned to where I stood. It must have been the sound of my steps that told him I had joined him on the plateau. He was wearing a dark green jacket that blended in with the color of the sur-

rounding grass and low bushes. His hair was grey and longish, partially covering his ears.

"It isn't usually crowded above the clouds," I replied, making little effort to hide my displeasure. I wasn't pleased at having to share the Cone with someone just then. I sat down on a patch of grass behind the stranger, feeling beforehand to see if it was wet. Among the thick tangle I found an empty can of soda pop carelessly left there. I picked it up and threw it into the depths below. I was aware that this was just as careless, but it seemed somehow more fitting for garbage to be found anywhere other than here.

"Yes, it isn't. I liked it best when I could be alone here, too." He said this without any reproach in his voice, which made me feel awkward. In fact, he could consider me the intruder since he had reached the top of the Cone first. "But I won't bother you for long. I'll be leaving soon."

"You don't have to go because of me," I said obligingly. "There's room for both of us."

The man did not reply, so we fell silent, gazing into the distance. The warmth I started to feel wasn't just from the strenuous climb. It was considerably warmer here in the sun than down in the clouds. I did not unbutton my jacket, however, even though I could feel sweat breaking out; the wind that never seemed to stop here at the top might blow through me.

"I haven't been on the Cone for a long time," said the man pensively, as though addressing someone invisible in front of him, rather than myself. "The last time I climbed up here I was your age."

I stared at his back in amazement. How could he know my age when he hadn't turned around to look at me? Probably by my voice. I hadn't seen his face, either, but even without the grey hair I could easily tell by his hoarse, wheezing voice that he was well into his 60s.

"You've missed quite a bit," I said with a smile.

"I know. I'm trying to make up for it now. I'm visiting places that meant something to me in the past."

"Did you stay at Dark Mountain very often?"

"Yes, at least twice a year. I never did learn to ski, although I loved to take long walks."

"Me, too. I'm not the least bit bothered by not being able to ski. Walking is just as pleasant, and you need a lot less equipment."

The grey head nodded in front of me. "At first I went for walks in different directions. But after I discovered the Cone, I gave up all the other places. I started coming here every day, almost like a ritual. Over time it became a real obsession. The only thing that could stop me was a snowstorm."

Strange, I thought. It's as if the old man was describing my own experience. I never imagined I'd ever find such a kindred soul. Most people think I'm an oddball because of my pilgrimages to the Cone. There was, however, one important difference.

"But it seems you got over your obsession. If I understand correctly, you stopped visiting the Cone. What prevented you from coming?"

The man did not reply at once. When he finally spoke again, his voice became softer, so that I had trouble mak-

ing it out against the blustering of the wind.

"I experienced something unusual here. Afterwards there was no sense in coming here any more."

I expected him to continue, but as the old man didn't elaborate, I had to curb my curiosity. For some reason he clearly did not want to talk about it, and good manners would not allow me to probe. We spent another few minutes in silence. I could feel the skin on my face start to prickle under the strong mountain sun. I should have brought some sun screen, although I hadn't actually expected the top of the Cone to be above the clouds.

"I like to return to places that mean something to me, too," I said at length, just to keep the conversation going. Although he had said he would be leaving soon, the old man continued to sit there, and it seemed silly not to talk while we shared this cramped space. "But it's never like it was the first time. The place might be the same, but the time is always different. That can't be helped, I'm afraid."

"Except if you return to some place at the original time," he said, his voice still low.

"In the past?" I asked with an inadvertent cry of disbelief.

The old man raised the collar of his jacket a little to protect himself from the strong wind that had just come up. Although quite blistering, the sun was deceptive. It would be easy to catch cold.

"Yes, in the past."

"Then it really would be just like the first time. Except it isn't possible. You can't go back into the past."

"Even so, if you were offered the chance to go back, which time in your life would you choose?"

My eyes began to skim over the endless landscape that surrounded me. Far to the east the sun had finally triumphed over the clouds and now wooded hills could be seen though the mist. By late afternoon it would clear up here, too, and Dark Mountain would return to summertime.

"I never thought about that," I said. "I don't know, maybe some point in my childhood. I would probably like to see myself as a boy." I stopped for a moment, staring blankly at the grey shroud beneath me. "That would certainly be strange – to meet your own self."

The old man turned his head a bit towards me, enough so that I could see his thick grey beard and sunglasses, but then he faced forward again.

"Why your childhood? Do you feel you were happier then than later in life?"

"It's hard to say," I replied after a brief hesitation. "Perhaps more innocent. There were happy moments afterwards, of course, but they lacked that early innocence. It seems to be more and more precious as time goes by. But what about you? Which time in your life would you go back to?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "At my age childhood is already far away and faded. I think I would choose something closer, something I remember better. I was very happy when I came here to the Cone. Perhaps even innocent, in the sense in which you talk about your childhood, although it didn't seem like that at the time. In any

case, I left innocence behind me forever on the Cone. I would be happy to meet myself again from that time."

I wiped the sweat off my brow with the back of my hand. "I bet the other one would be just as happy. Maybe even more so. It would be a very useful encounter for him. You could tell him first-hand what awaits him in the future, what he should stay away from, what he should avoid."

"Oh, no, not at all," replied the man quickly, raising his voice a little. "I wouldn't tell him that at all."

"You wouldn't tell your own self what the future holds in store?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I would ruin my own life if I did. The encounter itself would be extremely risky. It would be best if he didn't realize who he'd met."

"I don't understand."

"If I told him what the future holds, I would be depriving him of the fundamental support that makes life at all possible. Everything would become preordained for him, inevitable. He would lose not only hope but fear. And how can you live without hope and fear?"

"But what if, for example, there was some great misfortune or suffering awaiting him, that could easily be avoided if he was forewarned? Would you allow that to happen?"

"Of course."

"Wouldn't that be cruelty towards your own self?"

"Perhaps. But, there is actually no choice. You cannot prevent what has already happened, can you?"

I didn't know what to reply. I had the vague feeling that there was some sort of paradox involved, but I couldn't put my finger on it. No doubt it all hung from the infeasibility of the initial assumption about returning to the past.

The old man stood up and so did I. He was approximately my height, perhaps a bit stooped owing to the weight of his years. He stayed a few minutes more, staring at the sea of clouds that had now gently started to stir and thin out. Then he turned towards me and we were face to face for the first time.

I couldn't really see much of his face. It was hidden by his beard and the large sunglasses. Only his forehead was uncovered – it was even higher than mine because the grey strands had receded quite a bit towards the crown of his head.

"It's time to leave," he said. It might have been my imagination, but his voice seemed to tremble slightly, just like mine on the rare occasions when I am excited. He extended his hand and I took it in mine – a slim, bony hand, just like mine will probably be when I reach his age. "The Cone is all yours. Enjoy it while you can. One never knows what the future will bring."

"I'm glad we met," I said, more softly than I intended.

"I'm glad, too. Very glad."

He let go of my hand with some hesitation, almost unwillingly. Then he turned and headed down the steep slope, without looking back. He walked slowly, carefully. Like an old man. When he disappeared into the cloud, I suddenly felt a lump in my throat.

I stayed on the Cone for a long time that day. Almost until dusk. By the middle of the afternoon everything below me had cleared up. I slowly absorbed the endless, luminous panorama surrounding me. I wanted to remember it well. I intended, of course, to come here again the next day, but the old man was right: I did not know what awaited me. What if something prevented me from coming? What if a lot of time passed, maybe even several decades, before I climbed up the Cone again?

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Translated from the Serbian by Alice Copple-Tosic

Translation edited by Chris Gilmore

Zoran Zivkovic's previous stories for this magazine were "The Astronomer" (*Interzone* 144) – which also reappears in the English-language version of his four-part novel *Time Gifts* (Northwestern University Press, USA, Spring 2000) – and "The Window" (issue 152). He and his family live in Belgrade, Serbia, where he works as an author and publisher.

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All it takes is a little imagination!

Mumbling? No. One could never accuse a dramatic adaptation from the BBC of *mumbling*. The voice is clear. The voice is loud. And as attempts are made to sell these works to other countries, there must be no confusion, and irony should be kept to a minimum. In other words, a BBC adaptation is the equivalent of a cat that drags in the bird for the owners to see just how clever and generous it is. Proud cat; but poor bird. Poor birdy. Sometimes the bird is *badly* damaged, or mutilated beyond all recognition; and on occasions it has merely suffered a scratch and heart failure. At best, it is unscathed, leading the owner to believe that it might pick itself up and fly, fly away...

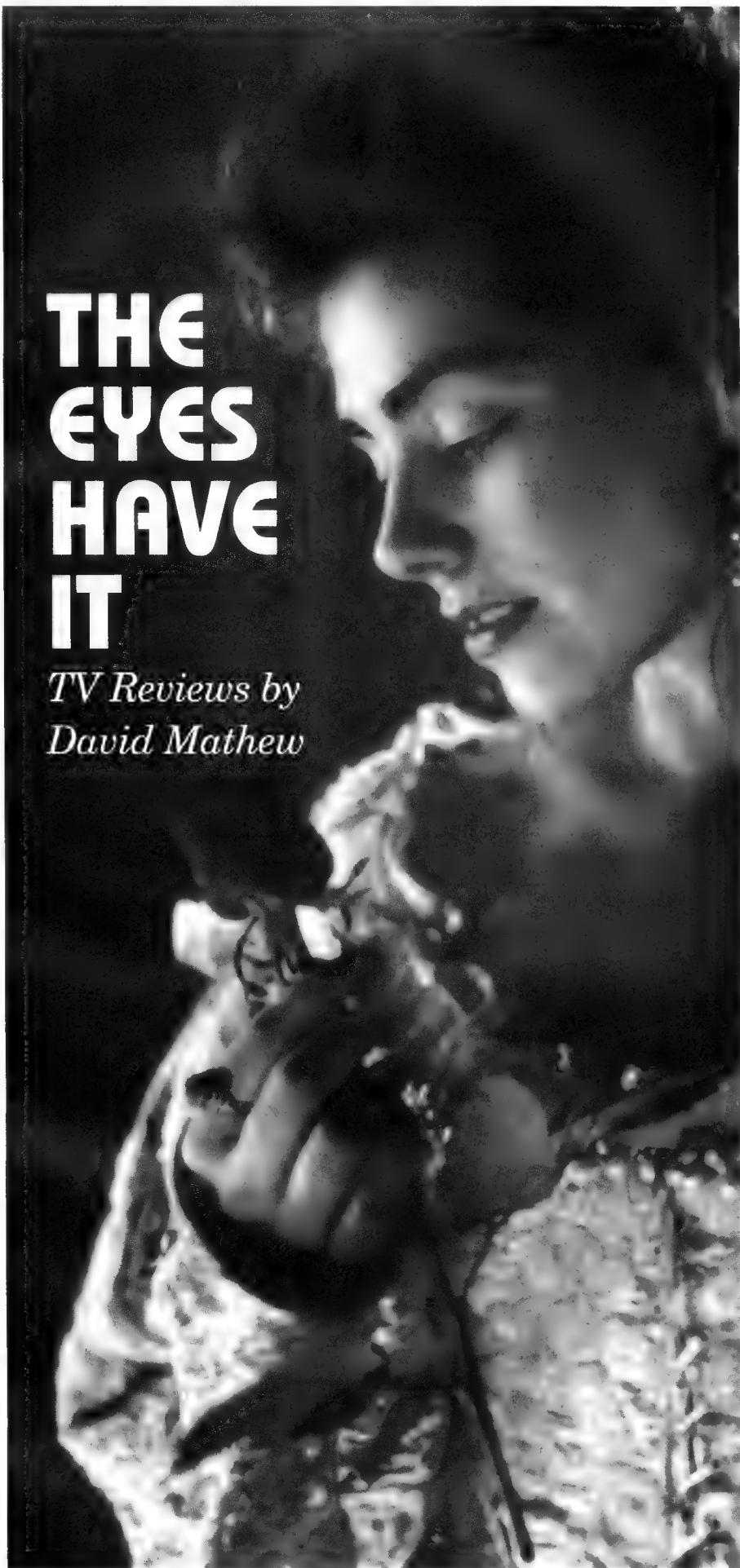
Cue *Gormenghast* (BBC 2).

This season's soarer is a re-working of Mervyn Peake's key trilogy – *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959) – a trilogy that, with the sort of horrible irony which was typical of Peake's final act, became extremely popular shortly after the author died, his mind mostly blank, after eleven years of psychiatric illness following a neurological disease, at the age of 56. Like it or not, this sort of biographical baggage is dragged along to any viewing of the BBC's noteworthy attempt at recreation. See, we already know Gormenghast, or think we do, regardless of whether or not we've read the texts. It was Peake's remarkable talent to have given a name to no less than a state of mind, a stately state; a depressed and guilty and fiery state.

Doesn't it resonate with you, the very word Gormenghast? "Gore" and "ghastly" are mumbles among the architecture of this great castle, and this seriously dysfunctional family. One thinks of hulking monstrosities and outbreaks of disease, even; which is why, at the beginning of the four-parter, the *appearance* of Gormenghast is rather too clean and bright. It doesn't match what you were thinking of exactly – those pastel colours – and arguably there is no other genre in which appearances are so important... to a contemporary audience. The demands to make fantasy and science fiction *look* good, *look* the part, are substantial. But there are some nice early experiments in colour that are worthy of something from Peter Greenaway: the whiteness in the kitchen, for example, or the way that Flay appears as an agent of darkness against the light; the hellish reds. Anyway. Appearances can deceive (none more so than in this enclosed world) and the state of mind quickly allows itself to be altered, charmed, teased – because it becomes obvious very soon that the BBC has done its homework, and that this is a most

THE EYES HAVE IT

TV Reviews by
David Mathew



respectful attempt.

So it should be, of course. Millions of pounds went into the years of pre-production and contracts, in order to secure a cast list of (by and large) household names, in Britain. Lynsey Baxter, Warren Mitchell, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Ian Richardson, John Sessions (an excitable performance, nicely played, in a Ken Dodd frightwig), Fiona Shaw, Zoe Wanamaker, Martin Clunes, June Brown, Stephen Fry, Richard Griffiths, Celia Imrie, Christopher Lee, Neve McIntosh, Windsor Davies, Sean Hughes, Spike Milligan, Eric Sykes – and on and on. Play spot-the-star, by all means, but remember to leave that second set of baggage behind: forget who they were on your screen the last time you met them, which in some cases is harder than others. June Brown is Dot Cotton from *EastEnders*, and vice versa; for me it was a while before I appreciated her role as Nanny Slagg, protector of the newborn Titus, a “hideous boy” who is unloved by his mother (Celia Imrie, in a remarkable amount of prosthetics, to make her appear overweight), and who is largely left alone by his father, who in turn becomes convinced that he (the father) is an owl.

Need it be mentioned that a descent into madness and darkness is swift? The kitchen boy, Steerpike, wants out of the heat and gloom, and sets upon a trail towards a dictatorship: his precociousness matched only, perhaps, by that of the author himself. (By the age of ten Peake was writing for a missionary magazine; he was born in China, where his father was a doctor, and at points the BBC’s Gormenghast is strongly Oriental to look at.) All he must do to satisfy his whims is murder anyone who gets in his way; and although I thought Steerpike’s performance rather hammy, there was no doubting his ability to convince when it came to the sweet-talking scenes, for example when he has to persuade the twin sisters that the castle and environs are rightfully theirs, and that, with a modicum of assistance, he will ensure the safe delivery of same into their hands. What he does instead, of course, his satanic conversion complete a few episodes later, is discover them as skeletons in a room in which he trapped them; then smash the bones into pieces, while a monkey whose tail has been chopped off runs screaming around in the shadows. As a war artist Mervyn Peake saw Belsen, after it had been liberated, and the experience – that of witnessing the evidence of what had already splashed across his imagination – affected him profoundly; and skeletal figures would be key components in his work for the rest of his creative life.



Gormenghast; above
Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Steerpike
Previous page: Neve McIntosh as Fuschia

We can only speculate on whether Mervyn Peake would have approved of the adaptation, but we cannot deny its honourable intentions, its charms, and its energy.

A word or two is required, before we finish, for Channel 5’s *The Tribe*. And the word might be “No.” And the second word might be “Jesus.” For by stark – by very stark – contrast indeed, there is *The Tribe*, which even if we discount the fact that it has clearly been made on a shoestring and a prayer to heaven, and that it’s a Saturday-afternoon filler for people who want something to watch before an early dinner but don’t like sport, is pretty damn weak. Or so it would appear: and appearances are all we have to go on sometimes, with television. Knowing nothing about this show, I tuned in, and admittedly I therefore came at it through a fog in which (presumably) the plot-furniture had been adequately arranged before my arrival; and I must also concede that a younger audience seems to be the intended one, if the average age of the cast members was anything to go by. But still... this was not Children’s Television.

It was, however, science fiction. So let’s join these youngsters briefly (that’s as much as you’ll be able to take) as they struggle to rebuild civilization after an epidemic has breathed its fire all over the world. Appearances first. For some reason everyone had on garish facepaint, frightwigs, punk get-up (but without the players displaying the commensurate get-up-and-go). It seemed as though the dread disease had delivered the hapless survivors into a 1980s Sigue Sigue Sputnik rock video. Out of the frying pan, and all that. But this was no Clichéville, no sub-standard Mad Max landscape, as cellophane-packed and bite-sized as a week’s worth of breakfast cereals. In fact, this was something very strange

indeed. It was, more or less, suburbia; it was a *soap opera*, only one that just so happened to be occurring after an apocalypse... I spent the first ten minutes (I’m not joking) believing that a previous plot strand was being picked up on: that the characters were rehearsing a play, or a musical or something. Why the garb? Why the slap? I kept thinking, eventually arriving at the solution.

Content second. Not necessarily is it the rudimentary acting of *The Tribe* that offends; it’s the arrant denial of the new reality. Forget the animals that would surely be stinking up the streets; forget the dead that would be stacked in collapsed scrums here and everywhere. Let’s have two girls, for example, dressed up as if for the Christmas Spice Girls Tribute Party, and their winsome rivalries for a boy’s affection – a boy who is utterly unaware of the storm his indifference is brewing. Let’s abandon any sense of context. If a decades-old pop promo is the look, or the fashion, then at the very least wouldn’t someone refer to it once in a while. (“Hey, Club, I like your spider-web face paint.” “Thanks, man, and your zigzags are the coolest.”) But no. The result is something like the comedy inherent in the Armstrong and Miller Show, in the spoof vet series, “Nude Practice”, in which the two comedians and a woman tend to animals and conduct their daily routines utterly starkers, and nobody else mentions it or even notices it.

Except... *The Tribe* wasn’t meant to be funny. Utterly deadpan, the characters went about their business, trying to determine work rotas (one of the men, uncharacteristically for teenagers and young twentysomethings, had decided that he didn’t actually want to do any work, and preferred to lie on his bed instead; which simply wasn’t cricket); and when might be a good time to bring some children into the world. “I think it’s time to start a family,” the one who looked like Gazzer announced to his purple-haired girlfriend. Come on now, ladies, how about that for a line to get you in the mood?

No. Jesus... All this said, I’m going to try to watch later episodes, and I’ll report back if I got it all wrong; if I’ve been a victim of oneupmanship... i.e. if it’s actually any good. I doubt it will be, but soaps are like diseases themselves, and they work at a part of the brain that doesn’t want to deal with bills and work. On the basis of this particular episode, think *Grange Hill* crossed with *Crossroads* production values, then Americanize it and give every character a name like Clay and Wink, and Dont and Nurd. If it’s not a joke, it should be; it really should.

David Mathew



DREAM of RAIN

Judith Berman

No one knew that Uncle Grey had been murdered until the traders arrived at Winter Fort. Crow was helping her mother pack away the new berry cakes when the traders, distant relations, shouted at the door of Eel House and were swiftly ushered in to see Crow's father. As they delivered their news, a flood tide of horror rushed through Crow, and the berry cakes tumbled out of her hands.

But her father merely sat in silence, impassive, hands on his knees. Then he asked Hunter to dress him in the Eel Hat and robe. Without a further word he left the house.

At first Crow could not move. Then she ran after her father, ran down through the smokehouses and drying racks to push her way through the agitated men and women and barking dogs that poured after him. She clutched her father's hand, but he did not even glance at

her, just kept walking steadily until he reached the shore.

The traders had lifted Uncle Grey out of their canoe and laid him above reach of the waves. Grey's skin had turned sickly pallid, like old halibut flesh. Wisps of his black hair stuck to the blood caked upon his nostrils and his parted lips. A mass of congealed gore covered his bare chest. Crow's father gazed for a long and awful moment at his dead brother. Then, in a hoarse, laboured voice not at all his own, he began to sing one of his ancestor songs.

Crow tightened her grip on her father's hand. When Grandmother hissed in her ear, "Come away from there, girl," Crow shot her a desperate glance. How could she leave her father and Uncle Grey at such a moment? But Grandmother shook her by the shoulder. Crow, following Grandmother's gaze, saw the fresh blood upon her own ankle.

Her father slowly turned and looked at them, then looked where they were looking. His song faltered, and he blinked at Crow. His hand squeezed hers for the briefest of moments, and then he extricated himself from her grip.

And Grandmother marched Crow back to Eel House.

Her confinement could not wait until after the wake. A corpse in the house was tricky enough, never mind a girl having her first period.

Grandmother bound Crow's fingers, and dressed her in a low, wide-brimmed hat so that her gaze might not touch the sky. A girl at this time of her life was very troublesome to the world, very potent.

Her cousins cleared a space beside her parents' apartment, and walled it off with planks. Grandmother led her inside. Grandmother hung a cedar-bark mat over the low doorway, and that was that. Crow could not leave the dark little room except to answer a call of nature, and then only at night. She could not talk to a man. Because she was a great nobleman's daughter, they might confine her as long as a year.

Everyone had been expecting it for months, but the sight of blood on her legs terrified Crow. It was as if she had been wounded like Uncle Grey, and her own life-blood now seeped from her womb. When the mat dropped into place, she felt as if she would never see the sky again.

She tried to tell herself it was silly. For everyone else, the great worry was what danger she might bring to them.

The wake for Uncle Grey began the next day. Men from Dawn House washed Grey and dressed him in quilled leggings and a sunshell crown, and they spread a Creator's Robe across his wounded chest. They laid him in the hall in front of the great carved and painted screen of Eel House, and arranged the Eel Hat and other heirlooms of the house around him.

For four days the women wept and chanted to Grey. Only in the morning and evening did the men of Eel House come to the house to sing. Crow's father wore old matting tied up with rope, and he had rubbed ashes on his face. He looked as if he had not slept at all. Cousin Hunter followed him like a shadow. With Grey's death, Crow realized, Hunter was now her father's heir.

Crow hoped those four days would be the worst she ever had to endure in her life. She had to fast and could not even speak, and with her hands bound up she could do nothing for herself. By the end of the first day she was already miserable with hunger. Grandmother watched her night and day to make sure she obeyed all the rules.

It was harder still to watch Grey's wake only through the tiny hole they had cut for her in the wall. She longed to be out there with the other women, telling Grey how much he had been to her, saying goodbye. She needed to look on his empty face for longer, as if hurting herself with that sight would teach her how to mourn.

But most difficult of all was the separation from her father. At the sight of his impassive face and hollow gaze, dread welled up and overwhelmed every other emotion.

She dreamed on each of the four nights. Each time, a rising tide trapped her beneath a cliff, and each time she

woke in terror just as rough waters clashed over her head, dragging her into darkness. Crow did not mention the dreams to anyone. She told herself that spirits and true dreams stayed away from a menstruating girl. But she knew they were a sign that worse was yet to come. Something terrible was rushing over the ocean toward her, toward Eel House and everyone she loved. And she was walled away helpless in her room, trapped just as surely as in her dream.

On the fifth day they burned Grey's body behind the houses. That day Crow's first period ended, and that night Grandmother unwrapped her hands and gave her dried salmon to eat. Now Crow was allowed to speak and to touch things, but she would have to wear the low-brimmed hat, even indoors, until they ended her confinement. Grandmother wanted to make sure the Master of Storm would not notice her.

That night Uncle Jade, lord of Dawn House and king of the south side of Winter Fort, came to Eel House to speak to Crow's father. Jade was, as always, dressed in splendour: a robe sewn with ivory and iridescent sunshell, heavy earrings of copper, and a figured woollen cap upon his long black hair. Firelight shimmered over the precious ornaments.

"It is good that we meet again alive, my brother-in-law," said Crow's father, sombrely.

"It is good, my brother-in-law," said Jade.

Crow's mother spread a mat for her royal brother to sit upon, and brought him fresh-roasted salmon and currant-berries. Only after Jade had finished eating, and drunk from a dipper of water, did he turn to Crow's father. "What do you intend to do?"

The lord of Eel House looked away, toward the fire. After a moment, Hunter, who sat beside him, said, "Grey's death must be paid for."

"Yes," said Jade, "but what payment will you demand?"

Crow's breath stuck in her throat as she waited for the answer. But again Hunter had to speak into the silence. "The murderer is a commoner. Grey was worth four lives of that sort."

"The witnesses say Grey stabbed the Thunder House man first," said Jade. "In Thunder House, they might believe the fatal blow was justified."

At this, Crow's father lifted his head to stare at Jade. Hunter said scornfully, "Do you think Grey's death isn't worth anything?"

"I'm only asking you to consider the consequences of seeking payment in blood," said Jade. "You don't want to start a war needlessly."

"We have lost one of our great nobles," said Hunter. "Thunder House has lost *no* one! Do you expect us to ignore this offense?"

"If you wish," said Jade, "I will travel to Spruce Town, and see what compensation the lord of Thunder House will offer – whether in blood or in wealth."

Hunter turned to Crow's father. Crow's mother reached forward with a stick to rearrange the fire. "It wouldn't hurt, would it?" she asked. "Just to see what their offer is."

There was a long pause. At last Crow's father spoke.

"Go if you wish, brother-in-law."

Crow let out her breath. It was a reprieve, at least for a while.

Before dawn, as the tide was running out, Uncle Jade's wizard offered prayers to the Master of Storm for calm seas and a safe voyage. Then Jade embarked for Spruce Town, taking with him Crow's three brothers – the heirs of his Dawn House mother-line – and twenty slaves to paddle his war canoe.

Crow heard about their departure when Grandmother brought in her breakfast. A stern and sombre emotion filled Grandmother this morning. "This is the most important time in your life," she lectured Crow. "These are the months that will form your character. You must pay close attention. You do not want to become like Grey's wife." Crow knew enough not to ask what had happened to her aunt. No one talked about Grey's wife since she had run away with her lover.

"Now," said Grandmother more briskly, opening a gut-skin bag, "we will spin and I will begin your instruction. There is a great deal to learn."

Crow obediently pulled out a handful of precious wool and began to tease it into a roll that she could spin upon her thigh. Grandmother began to tell her which of the women of the Eel House mother-line she would have to begin calling "sister-in-law" after she married, and who might still be "aunt."

Crow tried to keep her mind on it, but could not. The topic of her marriage always gave her a sick feeling. Just a few days before the traders had arrived with Uncle Grey's corpse, she had overheard her father and Hunter talking. "She will make you a good wife," Crow's father had said. "She is a good, quiet girl."

"She is a quiet girl," Hunter had agreed neutrally. Crow knew what that meant. Hunter did not particularly like her – never teased or joked with her, never even noticed her except with an occasional speculative glance – but he was willing to marry her because of her royal pedigree. Crow had crept away so she did not have to hear more.

The marriage was what her father desired. He had once said to Crow, smiling, "This way I can keep my favourite child with me." Uncle Jade, head of Crow's own mother-line, agreed it would be a good match, and Mother and Grandmother also wanted it. What else was there to say about it?

She and Grandmother spun for several weeks, while Grandmother talked to her about the fragile web of relationships she would enter into as a married woman. Crow was already expert at spinning. For years now she had been helping Grandmother, her mother, all her aunts. Even Grandmother's critical eye found little to fault in her fine, even yarn.

But to pass from daughter to wife in Eel House seemed as if it would require a skill she could not possibly learn – as if a dog were trying to twine a basket.

Since Crow had to remain in her room in daytime, they could not dye the wool. But one morning Grandmother arrived with more balls of yarn, dyed and undyed, and

the pieces of a loom. Without explanation, she directed Crow to assemble it. That was not difficult, either, though Crow's hat forced her to tilt her head awkwardly when she looked anywhere but her lap.

The two uprights fit tightly into sockets in the heavy wooden feet. Then she had to tie up the three crosspieces. Crow had seen it done, had helped, many times. After Grandmother poked and prodded at the loom to her satisfaction, she spoke.

"You know Eel House is old and your father has cut timber to rebuild it. That will be a great affair both for your father and for your future husband, and all of us from the Dawn House mother-line must do our utmost for our in-laws. Here is *your* task. You are to make a new Creator's Robe for your father, one he will be proud to wear before all the nobles of our country. This will help teach you what it means to become a woman – what it means for your actions to have consequences that all the world can see."

Crow looked at the balls of yarn and the loom. To weave a Creator's Robe for the lord of Eel House! Such a garment was the most precious that could be made by human hands. The women took long-stapled white wool from mountain goats hunted in the high country, and dyed small lots of it black or yellow with lichen, urine and bark. With the yarn they spun, they twined dazzling three-colour patterns so beautiful that people said they resembled zigzags of sunlight upon the Creator's tail feathers. Only a king or powerful lord wore such a robe, and only their sisters and daughters were ever taught the skill.

Crow's task was not just to weave any such robe, but one that her father would wear at the dedication of his new house, whose rebuilding he and Grey had been planning for years. There would be kings and nobles from many towns, thousands of guests.

"But he has a Creator's Robe," Crow said. "The one you made. Why would he want to wear *my* first robe?"

Grandmother said, "He threw that one onto Grey's funeral pyre."

Crow stared at Grandmother in shock. It was the first she had heard of it.

"It's done," said Grandmother. "It's done, and now you will make him another one."

Numbly, Crow began to tie up the heading cord to the main crossbar, and then to hang warp yarns upon the heading cord. When that was finished she gathered the lower ends of the warp yarns into little gut bags to keep them clean.

Then she looked at Grandmother for guidance. She had helped at every part of it, but she had never followed the task from start to finish.

"Go on," said Grandmother. "What's next?"

"Now I start to weave," Crow said uncertainly.

"Yes?" prompted Grandmother.

"I don't know what design to follow."

"It's your robe," Grandmother said. "You choose."

Crow had no idea what to choose. The news about her father's robe had scattered her thoughts in all directions. But she couldn't sit there doing nothing in front of Grandmother.

She measured out some undyed white wefts for the heading of the robe. Grandmother picked up a half-finished basket, but kept a watchful eye as Crow began to weave. The first rows determined how tightly woven the robe would be, and they were difficult to twine evenly. Grandmother did not say anything for a long time. When Crow had knotted off the last of the heading rows, she began to measure out some black wefts.

Grandmother lowered her basket. "You know the whole design? You've already thought it through?"

"Oh, no," said Crow. "I – I thought I should start, while I decided."

"You have to get it all in your head first! The whole pattern! This is important work you're doing. You aren't just playing with your dollies!"

"I'm sorry." Crow put down the ball of yarn she was holding. She thought Grandmother was being unfair. Almost every robe Crow had seen bore a black selvage line between the heading and the border designs. She really didn't have to decide just yet.

"Don't be sorry. Think! What kind of robe do you want? Single figures repeated on a white field? Do you want it solid with pattern? What designs will you use? How will the border balance with the centre? You have to know before you start!"

Crow tried to look as if she were thinking. She took up her spinning, and Grandmother picked up her basket again. Thin bars of sunlight crept slowly across the cedar floor. Nothing came to her, not the faintest glimmering of a notion.

It was late summer and the silver salmon were running, and the weather remained unusually bright and hot. Everyone should have been out at the streams and rivers gathering the winter's provisions. But a surprising number of people lingered in town.

Crow's father was among them. If he were really going to feast a multitude of guests this winter, he ought to be journeying over the mountains to collect copper nuggets from his trading vassals in the inland forests. Instead he spent hours every day on the front steps of Eel House, staring out to sea. "He hardly says a word," Crow's mother told her. He had even abandoned his carver's knives, and the cottonwood models he was always whittling.

The silver salmon had dwindled and the humpbacks had started to gather at the rivermouths before Uncle Jade returned from Spruce Town. Crow heard the news shouted when Jade's canoe was sighted on the horizon, and she dimly heard people rushing down to the beach. But Crow's father came the opposite way, into the house, to his seat beneath the painted screen of Eel House. Hunter took up a position nearby.

When Jade entered, Crow's father said, with effort, "It is good that we meet again alive, my brother-in-law."

"It is a good day," said Jade.

Crow's mother seated him and brought him food. When Jade had eaten and drunk, he put aside the water dipper. "They have agreed to pay."

Crow's father glanced away. After a moment, Hunter said, "With what?"

"Twenty boxes of oil," Jade said, "twenty sea-otter robes, a war canoe from the Outer Islands, a pair of walrus tusks and four slaves."

Jade paused and looked at Crow's father. Crow guessed his task hadn't been easy. He had been in Spruce Town a long time. "Your mother-line could pay such a ransom for you and not be ashamed," said Jade. "It's a generous offer. Thunder House is not wealthy and this will beggar their lord."

"Blood payment," said Hunter, "would be better."

"The murderer has run away."

"Then the lord of Thunder House is a coward," Hunter said. "A true nobleman would offer his *own* life for the payment, if it would stop a war!"

"But will you accept what he *has* offered?" said Jade. "Will you go to Spruce Town to make peace?"

Crow's mother looked at her husband searchingly. The silence in the sun-striped hall lengthened. Crow could hear the wail of a seagull as it flew over Eel House.

Then her father said, "Yes, perhaps we should go."

But he did nothing. It was obvious to Crow that her father didn't want to accept the payment. He sat on the front steps of Eel House, or in his seat beneath the painted screen, and every day he grew grimmer and more silent. She could see Grey's death smouldering in his belly like a hot coal, burning outward through his flesh.

Meanwhile Crow's education continued as if nothing were out of the ordinary. Grandmother was instructing her now about a noblewoman's character. "You haven't ever been a rash or noisy girl but now you must become even more reserved. A woman must consider her words four times before she speaks aloud. It's said a woman's intemperate speech has started many wars.

"You must be even more careful of your conduct than your speech. Some day you may be tempted by desire. I hope on that day you will recall how Grey died because of *his* wife's disgraceful lapse."

Crow could not choose a design for the robe she was to weave. She asked Grandmother if she might make a spruce-root hat instead, and one of their Dawn House cousins could paint it with the emblems of Eel House and the Wolf clan.

But Grandmother said, "Any commoner can twine a basket, or a hat. Besides, you must finish what you start – that's another lesson."

She saw few people regularly except for Mother and Grandmother. Even her mother did not linger in her room. Grandmother said that a girl's own mother made a bad teacher. She would be too strict, or too indulgent.

Sometimes Grandmother did allow Crow's childhood playmates to visit her. But Crow had never been close to those girls. She had always preferred her father's company. She loved his cedar-scented carving shed better than any other place in the world. There she would curl up and watch his long fingers wield his knives and paintsticks, his jade adzes and bark templates. He would tell her stories about the images he was carving, about when gods walked the human world, scattering fragments of power that only the pure and courageous could master.

Now her father was as far away as Grey, burning to ash before he ever came to his funeral pyre.

At the new moon, the wizard of Eel House summoned his servants and flew away on spirit wings. Crow was menstruating again, and Grandmother came to her room to make sure she did not watch. So Crow only listened to the beat of the drum and the nasal, yelping songs. She still knew the exact moment when the wizard's long matted locks began to writhe in the air and crawl along the floor like snakes. Her own scalp began to prickle.

When he returned to his body, the wizard told Crow's father what his servants had shown him: Grey's murderer had returned to Spruce Town.

Crow's father stood up suddenly in front of his painted screen, fists clenched at his sides. Crow watched in helpless fury as Hunter rose beside him and spoke. "Shall we go now to Spruce Town?"

"Yes," whispered the lord of Eel House. "Yes."

The Eel House men readied their canoes. But Uncle Jade was not foolish or unobservant, and of course Crow's mother told him everything. When the Eel House men had finished their preparations, Jade, too, was ready, with Crow's brothers to bear him company and all his slaves to paddle the canoe. It was only fitting, he told Crow's father, since he had arranged the settlement.

Crow sat alone in her room while everyone went down to the beach to see them off. She could hear singing, faintly, and voices calling. And then they were gone.

That night, Grandmother came as usual to take Crow for her walk. When they returned to Eel House, the hearth fire had been banked for the night. Only a flickering red glow lit up the painted screen and the carved posts that flanked it. Crow lingered a moment gazing at the screen. It was one of the ancient treasures of Winter Fort. Painted in stark red and black, it depicted the story of the Wolf Mother and the pups she had birthed to the first king of the wizards.

Crow's father had traced those figures for her many times, showing her how to read them. Here, in the centre, within this red outline, was the figure of the princess, his ancestress who had suffered so much. These faces on either side were her children donning their spirit robes, shown halfway between wolf and human form, and these strange eyes and faces, and faces within eyes staring out of limbs and bellies, were the divine power that filled them up. At the bottom the dismembered king of the wizards bared his teeth in an ambiguous smile.

Now the figures seemed to move, crawling slowly through red-lit darkness. A chill ran up Crow's spine.

That night she had the dream again. Once more she stood upon a rocky beach while waves crashed over her, threatening to sweep her away and swallow her forever.

"Why *can't* you choose a design?" Grandmother asked in exasperation.

"I just can't," Crow said.

"You've never seen such a garment before?" Grandmother said sarcastically. "Maybe your father wore one once? You can't copy that?"

"I've seen lots of them," Crow said. Of course she was familiar with every detail of the robe her father had burned with Grey. In a central white field stood six columns of black rectangles, evenly spaced, each bearing a long black tassel. Borders of zigzags and tiny diamonds outlined the central field, and a luxurious fringe hung from sides and bottom. Crow could no longer picture it without seeing it atop Grey's flaming corpse.

"Or perhaps you saw my son with one?" She meant Uncle Jade. "Or the north-side king in Wolf House?"

Crow recalled the Wolf House robe perfectly, too. Except for the way the rectangular figures alternated with the design called "tattoo," it was just like her father's. Grandmother had woven both of them.

"Do you have a favourite?" Grandmother said, growing even more exasperated. "Is there one you like more than the rest?"

With an effort Crow tried to think. "There was," she said, hesitantly, "the one the king of Sandspit Town wore at his wife's funeral feast."

Grandmother snorted. "You saw that robe once, when you were eight years old."

"I remember it. It was beautiful."

"Remember!" Grandmother said. "What could you remember!"

Grandmother had been at that feast, but Crow described the robe anyway. "The central field was divided into three, and the sections on each side had the designs 'tree root' alternating with 'diamonds,' and in the centre was 'feathers,' and in the borders there was 'geese in flight,' and then solid white and solid black with a black fringe. It used yellow only as accents."

Grandmother looked startled. "You remember every robe you've seen?"

"I don't know," said Crow. She had always thought Grandmother expected her to.

"Why can't you choose a design then? Why don't you just *copy* one? This isn't the only robe you'll ever weave!"

"I don't *know*," said Crow, close to tears.

But after Grandmother left her, she resolved to do just that, to copy the Sandspit Town robe. She could picture it with perfect clarity. She fixed it in her mind as Grandmother had demanded, the whole pattern at once, and began to weave.

Crow tried to make herself enthusiastic. It was indeed an heartbreakingly lovely robe, and she truly had often thought about it since that long-ago feast, turned the exquisite patterns over in her mind, wondering which method of twining would work the best for each pattern. Each method imparted a different texture to the weaving, a subtly different way light moved and caught upon the figures.

But then she began thinking how difficult this robe would be to execute. The designs and techniques would give pause to an expert weaver, much less an inexperienced girl. It would be easy to fail and end with something ridiculous.

And then she began to think that she should have chosen a simpler design, and then she began to think again of her father's robe.

And she thought about how her father had flung it on the fire as if it were a worthless piece of matting.

If he could burn that, what else would he destroy in a conflagration of grief: his wealth, his house, his good name, his own life?

Her hands faltered, and she found herself sitting in front of the loom, staring at her knees.

The world slipped closer to winter. The Master of Storm sent the first cold rains to rattle upon the roof of Eel House. On her nightly walks with Grandmother, Crow could smell the decaying leaves and dying grass. Surf pounded the rocks on Loon Point with a steady drumbeat.

Crow counted: one day for the men to cross the straits, ten to paddle up the forbidding coast to Spruce Town. If the weather held, eleven days to return. But how long would the peace ceremonies last? Maybe they would feast a long time in Spruce Town.

Meanwhile she tried to make herself work on the robe. She sat in front of the loom, weft yarns in her hand. Sometimes she did manage to twine a row or two. In the course of weeks, she progressed almost a full handspan.

But as she finished the solid-colour bands, and reached the more complex border designs of bars and zigzags, her work slowed even further. She began to sleep longer and longer each morning, even though it was part of her training to rise early. Her terrifying dream of drowning visited her night after night, and afterward she would lie awake until dawn. Sometimes, very late, she would creep from her room into the ember-lit hall and stare up at her father's painted screen as if those figures could bring him home safe. The crowding eyes and faces peered back at her enigmatically.

Eventually she could no longer work at all. She would fiddle with weft yarn in the lower part of the hanging warps. Circles: if you took three strands, plaiting them like a tiny rope, and let your braid wander either vertically or horizontally across warp and weft, you could make rounded outlines as if painting with the wool: ovals or hands, even eye- or head-shapes like those on her father's screen, designs no one had ever woven into cloth. She pulled them out so Grandmother wouldn't see them, but when she sat down to weave the next day, she would again end up miserably playing with yarn.

"What's wrong?" Grandmother would ask her. "Your weaving is fine, girl. Why don't you weave? Are you worried about your father?"

But when Crow could not give voice to her terrible fears, Grandmother would lose patience. "Oh, it's hard growing up," she would say. "It's hard to work hard. But you don't escape one by avoiding the other."

One afternoon she heard a shout outside Eel House: canoes on the horizon. Children and dogs poured out the door. The women followed more slowly, leaving Crow alone in an empty house. She huddled on her bedding and tried to tell herself that of course her father had yielded to Uncle Jade, of course he made peace.

But then she heard commotion, anguished wails. She shoved out of her dark room, scrambled across the hall to

the front door, and then she was racing down to the beach.

This time it was her father whom they carried up, bloody and unmoving, to lay above the tide. Crow tried to shove through the crowd, but Grandmother grabbed hold of her. Crow tore loose, wailing, "He's dead! He's dead!"

Grandmother caught her again. "Not yet."

"I have to go to him!" Crow screamed. She could see her father's lolling head, the dark blood that soaked the shredded bark bandaging his side. Her mother knelt beside him, hands busy, face expressionless.

"You have to endure," Grandmother said harshly. "What you also have to learn is to endure."

Crow could not endure, not any longer. She had waited for this moment in dread for too many silent, unending days. Grief opened its maw and swallowed her into darkness. She twisted and turned in Grandmother's arms, screaming, striking out viciously. Her dress ripped, and a strap broke. Strange brilliance pierced her eyes.

Then unfamiliar hands seized her. "You must calm yourself," Hunter's voice said in her ear, and the sound of it shocked her into stillness.

Panting, Crow tried to blink the brightness out of her eyes. Grandmother, looking very old, gripped Crow's hands. A red stripe marked her cheek.

Then Crow understood what the light was. Over Grandmother's shoulder, she could see the horizon where endless ocean met the vastness of sky. Wind and grey clouds streamed landward, and flocks of white terns soared above the waves, wheeling and crying.

Grandmother bent to pick up Crow's hat, and tied it upon Crow's head. But Crow knew it was already too late.

Grandmother propelled Crow back to Eel House, back to her dark room. Crow sat down on her bed and buried her face in her knees. Grandmother put an arm around her shoulders, stroked her hair. "We have to bear whatever must be borne," Grandmother said in a low voice. "It's no different, man or woman. Fortitude, courage, mastery of one's emotions – these are the foundation of a noble character. You must keep your composure no matter what terrible things occur."

"But –" Crow sobbed, "if he dies, if he dies –"

"If he dies," said Grandmother, "he will have wanted you to bear it with the dignity becoming a great lord's daughter."

So Crow knew there was no way out of the tiny room they had confined her in.

She tried to swallow the grief that had swallowed her, because Grandmother wanted her to. Eventually she at least managed to stop her tears. "Uncle Jade," she asked, "my brothers – where are they? Are they all right?"

"Dawn House is neutral, child, remember?" Grandmother said. "Hunter and his men are here first because they did not stop to eat or rest bringing your father home."

"But Uncle Jade –" Crow tried to say, "he'll be caught by the storm –"

"No one can say what the First Ones will do when their notice is attracted," said Grandmother. "Maybe the Master of Storm didn't see you." She did not speak with conviction.

Perhaps, Grandmother told her later, if her father had

not laid eyes on the murderer, he might have accepted the payment for Grey's life and gone home – bitterly, unwillingly, but he might have done it.

But perhaps the lord of Thunder House had not really wanted to make peace. Why else would he have included Grey's handsome young murderer, swaggering in his shark's-tooth earrings and finest skin tunic, in the peace party?

At any rate, it happened all over again. Just as Grey had pursued his wife just to bring her home, but had fallen into a blind rage at the sight of her lover, so Crow's father burst into a passion of violence the instant he laid eyes upon Grey's murderer. He flung himself forward, shouting, and his bone dagger sliced again and again through the murderer's chest and throat.

The lord of Eel House should not have hidden a weapon at a peace settlement, but he was not the only one. Two Spruce Town men fell upon him with knives they had also concealed. Hunter ran to his uncle's defense with his own hidden blade. The rest of the Eel House men grabbed weapons from their canoes. There had been a bloody battle on the foreshore, among the decaying tombs of the Spruce Town kings, but Hunter had rallied the Eel House men long enough to lift up his fallen uncle and withdraw.

Now, said Grandmother, Grey's death had indeed been paid for in blood, but only with a single commoner's life, and the death of Crow's father would destroy any reckoning of the score. Nothing had been settled, nothing at all.

Grandmother ordered all the Dawn House women home for safety, in case the enemy arrived in pursuit. That included Crow, although she had to wait until nightfall to leave.

She desperately wanted to stay. At least in Eel House her father lay nearby. But there was no arguing with Grandmother.

Grandmother drew Crow's marten-fur robe across her face and led her through the hall to the door of Eel House. Outside, the rain had already begun. Without torches she and Grandmother climbed the path that led over the ridge to the south side of town.

Grandmother had ordered Uncle Jade's slaves to prepare another room for Crow in Dawn House, and they had already carried over Crow's belongings. Her Dawn House room was different: bigger, with wider cedar boards that bore a different pattern of adzing. Different voices murmured beside the central hearth, and the air smelt more of fish and damp cedar than of spruce boughs. But the room was still the same: walls pressing close, darkness, a sliver of view.

Crow crawled into bed, pulling the furs around her. She felt as empty as a long-abandoned house. The darkness weighed on her. The hall quieted as people settled into their own beds, and soon she could hear only the rain beating on the roof. She wondered if her father had died yet.

The hours dragged by. Wakefulness stubbornly refused to release her. At last she threw aside her covers, pulled a cedar-bark rain cloak around her. She tied on her hat and crept out of her room. The house was still.

Outside, rain drove at her mercilessly. Her feet found

the bare path leading down to the beach. The tide was out, and wet sand glimmered faintly in the murk. She walked along the water's edge. Swells crashed on the jagged reefs below Loon Point, throwing up sheets of spray. Even within the protected bay, the water was restless, flooding and shrinking across the flats.

She reached the boulders of Loon Point and scrambled along them, feeling her way with hands and feet. Finally she stood at the very tip. Sea foam boiled over the reefs, so white it seemed to glow with light. Her hat restricted her view of the open ocean. Mindful of her training, she did not look up. It would be only rain and dark water, anyway. Nothing to see. The whole world as dark and small as her room.

The wind picked up and began to drive waves over her feet. The tide was rising swiftly. Crow knew she ought to turn back. Instead, she watched surf pour over the rocks, cutting off her route to safety.

Each wave broke higher. Ice-cold seawater surged around her knees, her waist. Soon each wave was throwing her against the boulders. She knew she was not supposed to speak or cry out. She had to endure whatever happened. But when the first wave broke over her head, foam and darkness crashing around her, and she could no longer touch bottom, she knew that after all she wanted to live.

She clung to a boulder. "Help me," she screamed into the blinding spray, into the roar of the surf. "Somebody help me!" There was no answer. Who would hear her? Another wave thundered over her. "*Help me!*"

But then, astonishingly, the waves began to recede. The water did not withdraw outward, but to either side, until Crow's feet touched the stones again. A path of bare rock led downward toward a faint light.

The trail was clearly an invitation, but one almost as terrifying as the grinding surf. At first Crow could hardly move.

Still, some invitations were more perilous to refuse than accept, and she *had* begged for aid. Trembling, Crow began to climb down the steep new trail. It led past boulders fringed with seaweed, past orange starfish splayed in the cracks, past crabs that scuttled furiously away, toward a destination still hidden behind the growing light.

A halibut eyed her from a muddy flat. Its gills feathered in and out as if it still lurked in water. She saw drifts of human bones, and skulls green with seaweed. Rain spattered her face.

And then, suddenly, she was falling through clouds. She cried out in fear, clutched at nothing.

Falling. Wind tore at her hair, her wet clothes.

A shape hulked in the clouds. She fell toward it. A squall of rain whipped around her. Storm clouds raced past and revealed what lay ahead. It was a man, maybe, but the size of a mountain. He wore a rain hat and a long rain cape, and only a fringed wizard's apron besides that. Streamers of cloud clung to his hat.

Then she realized she was not falling at all, but still standing upon the road under the sea, and the personage who stood ahead of her was after all only man-sized. A gale billowed in his cape and rain poured down. She

was shaking from cold or sheer terror. She knew this was the Master of Storm.

A part of Crow's mind reminded her of the tales of beautiful princesses who for better or worse had attracted the attention of the First Ones. She knew she was not beautiful, and it was hard to believe that what smouldered in this god's intense dark eyes was desire.

But here she was.

Wind tangled the god's black hair. Finally he held out his hand, which dripped with rainwater.

"Welcome to my house," he said.

She raised her trembling hand to his. When he touched her, a jolt passed along her skin and she realized she was falling again; they were both falling through limitless space, had never stopped. She wondered what he meant by his house. There was nothing around them but rain and scudding storm clouds, and the taste of salt spray.

"This is my house," he said, in a quiet voice that cut through all the noise of the storm.

And then they went inside his house, or maybe they had never been outside it. Vast banks of clouds raced wildly past, and through the gaps she could see forever, an eagle's view: mountains rearing up, glaciers flowing, green islands and storm-racked seas stretching to the ends of the world. She realized they were not falling, but flying.

"Is it what you wanted?" he whispered in her ear, a lover's whisper.

And then he touched her forehead, and she stood once more in her room within the unfamiliar walls of Dawn House. A torrential downpour thundered upon the roof.

Her clothes were soaking wet. Crow stripped and crawled naked into her furs.

The storm raged for days. Rain changed to wet blizzarding snow and back again, and powerful swells overran Loon Point to crash ashore right in front of Dawn House, until it seemed as if the house itself might be swept away.

No amount of adjustment to the smokehole vent kept out the wind. Clouds of snowflakes drove down through the smokehole to vanish in the great hearth, which now blazed night and day. Smoke filled the house. Even at midday, with oil lamps burning, it was dark in her room.

Mother and Grandmother braved the storm to help tend the lord of Eel House in his final hours. So, except for an aunt who brought food, Crow was left completely alone. It was a relief. She was afraid and ashamed to tell anyone what had happened.

She huddled into a fur robe and for hours on end tried to think of nothing. When that failed, she moved to where she could peer into the main hall. The room had a good view of the posts and screen of her uncle's royal apartment. Crow's father had made that screen, which showed the Creator holding the first sunrise in His beak, and regarding it with an alert and acquisitive eye. Crow remembered her father painting the screen when she was a little girl. She remembered the awe and love she had felt as she watched his skilful fingers tilt his paint-stick just so to narrow or thicken each perfect, graceful line.

Staring at her father's greatest work, Crow thought

that for the first time she understood the figures of power upon the great screens and treasure boxes of the nobility. Her mind had tried to make sense of the Master of Storm and had told her separate things: man, cloud, ocean, gale, sky. But what the god had really looked like was all of those together. And all of it was alive, pulsing with something she had perceived only in her throat and belly, in her terror-stricken, exhilarated heart.

The days passed. Still Crow's father lingered, weakening with fever. She began fiddling with yarn again to fill up the long, dreary hours, trying out the graceful lines her father drew with such ease and such intense concentration: eyes within eyes, faces staring out of ears and bellies, the squatting, split-open bodies.

But these shapes were only the pieces. The power of those figures grew from how the pieces were put together. She thought of her father explaining his paintings for which kings and nobles emptied their houses: this a head, this the body, this the divine spirit. In her father's paintings it was always as if the being was still and in motion at the same time. He confined those crawling, moving, vibrating shapes within the rectilinear side of the box, the pentangular screen, to create the perfect balance between compression and explosion.

Crow pulled all of her doodling out again, carefully. She didn't want Grandmother to notice the yarn growing tatty. And then she pulled her robe close against the icy wind that drove through the cracks of her little room. When she found herself wishing her father could paint the god, she told herself angrily not to think like a child. The meeting had been a dangerous and evil thing, of a piece with the storm that now threatened Uncle Jade and her brothers.

Grandmother had tried so hard to make sure the Master of Storm did *not* notice her. Now Crow's character, which her confinement was supposed to shape, had been spoiled. She had become like Grey's wife, ruled by desire. Worse – it was a *god* who had touched her. The stories showed what a terrible fate *that* could bring to a town.

But she could not stop thinking about it.

The rain turned once more to snow, and this time the snow began to stick. The gale blew harder, lashing the ocean into a white-frothed frenzy.

Her father, Crow thought, would place the god's face in the middle, the body split open to either side, as he had done with the Creator in the Dawn House screen. And because it was the god's immense house of sea and sky as well as his being that filled up Crow's mind, the whole would be the shape of a gabled house front or a house-lord's screen – five-sided. No one had ever made a five-sided robe, but that would be the only way to show the Master of Storm.

Finally Crow decided that at this point nothing could lower Grandmother's opinion of her. She counted out the warp yarns to separate the middle section, and then she began the first of the figures, the face of Wind peering over the god's head.

Outside, the gale blew on, and snow piled up in heavy drifts, day after day. No canoe could have reached Winter Fort whether friend or foe. Now Crow's fingers were

flying, even with the difficult technique of the wandering braids, and the awkward curved spaces she had to infill. On either side of Wind she put the Raindrops, little faces within heavy black ovals, and then below that on the centre panel would come the Master of Storm himself. She was using up her yellow yarn at an appalling rate. When it grew too dark in the short afternoons to continue, Crow would lie on her bed, the vision ever in front of her of the god confined in limitless space.

When her aunt brought food, Crow waited anxiously for her to notice, waited for the reproaches. But no one glanced into the dark corner where her loom sat.

On the eighth day after her encounter, when Crow had nearly completed the Raindrops, Grandmother at last came to visit her. Grandmother was crouched upon Crow's bedding, too weary even to lecture, when she dropped a chunk of a berry cake they had been sharing. The piece bounced and rolled along the cedar floorboards. Grandmother sighed and climbed onto her knees to reach for it. When she straightened, her eyes fell upon Crow's loom.

Crow cringed. Grandmother knelt there motionless for a moment. Then she climbed to her feet, and took the few steps to the loom. She gripped the fabric, peered and prodded at it.

"What," she said sharply, "is this?"

Crow didn't know what to answer. Now she was furiously ashamed of her childishness. She had probably caused her uncle's and brothers' deaths, at the very least, and she might bring on the destruction of her whole town before the Master of Storm was done with her. And here she had been playing with yarn.

"Where does this come from?" Grandmother demanded.

Crow shook her head. "I – " she tried, "it's just, I – " But she couldn't bring herself to tell the truth. Finally she said, "A dream."

"A dream? A spirit showed you how to do this?"

"I," said Crow, "was just, just playing around, if you outline the shapes – "

"What *was* the dream?"

And Crow haltingly described the road under the sea, the house of storm. When she was done, Grandmother said, "No one else will know, not until it's finished. Do you understand?"

Crow let Grandmother depart without telling her the dream had been real.

But as she wove, the wind after all relented, and swells quit piling up so fiercely against the shore. And one day the lord of Eel House seemingly changed his mind and decided to live.

And the next day Uncle Jade's canoe was sighted on the horizon. When Uncle Jade and her brothers stumbled into Dawn House, haggard and filthy from their imprisonment upon an uninhabited island, Crow could only cover her face with her hands and weep.

Other winter storms, less violent, blew in and departed. The year turned and days grew longer. Uncle Jade travelled again to Spruce Town to persuade Thunder House to leave matters as they were, a death for a death, and he returned.

Crow moved to the side panels, the Storm Clouds soaring beneath the god's outflung arms. Her father, they said, could arise from his bed now and walk a few steps. Still she did not confide the truth to Grandmother.

Then one day she and Grandmother were knotting the last of the fringe. After they finished, Crow sat staring at the robe for hours, until it was too dark to make out the figures. She had been holding her breath waiting for disaster to strike Winter Fort, and it had not. Maybe she would never have to tell anyone.

They did not end her confinement right away. There were still arrangements which the feud with Thunder House had delayed: exchanges of gifts between Dawn and Eel Houses, preparations for her marriage. It seemed, too, that her father still brooded over that paltry commoner's death, and whether it could be sufficient compensation for the loss of his brother.

But at last the day arrived. Grandmother brought two slaves who bathed Crow and washed her hair, and dressed her in new clothes. They pierced her lower lip and inserted the ivory bead of womanhood.

Then they covered her head with a hood and led her out of her room to Uncle Jade and her brothers, who in turn brought her out the front door of Dawn House into the pearlshell brightness of a cloudy spring day. They walked in a procession along the strand, down the row of huge wooden houses, and then over the ridge to the north side of Winter Fort. The hood kept Crow looking at her feet. Her lip hurt.

They came to Eel House. Hundreds of people had crowded inside. Uncle Jade led her four times around the house while the Wolf clan men sang for her. He brought her to stand in front of her father's carved seat and pulled back her hood.

Crow was shocked to see how stooped her father was, how thin and feeble. Although the day was warm, he clutched a fur robe around his shoulders.

Next to him stood Hunter, handsome and vital. A splendid young man, as everyone said. No doubt he had been whispering in her father's ear all spring, urging him to further bloodshed.

With shaking hands, Crow's father tied a sunshell crown upon her head, and turned her around to face the crowd. Hunter began to distribute the gifts. Next she and Hunter were sitting in front of the crowd, eating from the same bowl. When they finished, the guests went home.

"Husband," said Crow's mother, formally. "Your daughter has something for you."

They stood with Hunter and Crow's father in the apartment behind the painted screen of Eel House. Grandmother unfolded Crow's robe upon a carved chest, and stepped back.

Neither of the men said anything for a long moment. The figures looked misshapen and awkward to Crow, lifeless. She wanted to shrink away and apologize. How could she think to offer this crude thing to her father, the master carver?

At last Hunter released a pent-up breath. "What is it?"

Crow felt very shy in front of him. She had not spoken to a man in months. She forced her lips and tongue to move. "It's the Master of Storm. In his house."

"Where did you learn *this*?" There was a new sound in Hunter's voice, one she could not at first identify. Then, with surprise, she realized it was longing: not for her, but for the robe.

"A dream," Crow lied.

Hunter glanced back toward his uncle. Crow's father stood in silent contemplation of the robe, rubbing his chin. At last he took a few steps forward – he walked so haltingly – and lifted it. He gazed at its figures another long moment, and then in one smooth movement placed it on his shoulders.

The long white fringe swung in the air, the heavy robe rippled, and suddenly the figures came alive again. They crawled and pulsed, pushed outward against the straight borders she had confined them in, exploded inward into limitless space. And Crow's father was no longer a weak, grieving old man. He was once more lord of Eel House, cloaked in mystery and power.

Hunter reached out a hand to caress the robe. "The Rainstorm," he said, slowly. "Uncle, our enemies still owe us a debt of blood. Who could deny us the right to take their emblems in payment? And she's even had a dream about it. The gods mean it to be. Renaming our hall 'Thunder House' would shame them in front of the world."

No! Crow almost cried out loud. She hadn't made the robe for this. If they flaunted their enemies' name like a trophy cut from a dead man, there would only be more bloodshed, more killing, grief without end. How would she keep silent? How could she endure?

Then she noticed her father. He didn't seem to be listening to Hunter.

He was raising and lowering his arms, as if about to dance. He was watching the turbulent figures crawl and push outward as the robe moved.

He was smiling in delight.

"We will keep this treasure a secret until our new house is built," he said to Crow, and there was mischief in his voice.

In that moment Crow understood that she had won something, was still winning it. She had kept the Master of Storm's power from hurting anyone. She had bound up the wild currents of divinity that had swirled around her, caught them in her weaving. Her robe was proof.

And spirit robes always transformed their wearers. The Wolf Children had donned their spirit robes to become wolves in fact. What would happen to those who wore the Rainstorm? Would they find all that they had shut away inside them, shame or rage, secrets never told, grief beyond bearing, released into the open sky?

The robe was just beginning its work on her father. Crow thought, in a surge of hope: Hunter would wear it in his turn, and he would be changed no matter what he intended.

"Where are you going?" Hunter asked. It was time to retire, for the first time, into their new bedroom.

"To the forest," Crow said. Hunter would understand she meant a call of nature. She ducked through the low

door of Eel House, and hopped down the steps. Outside, a sandy trail led through beach grass that was waist-high already with the approach of summer. Beyond lay the smooth waters of the bay, and beyond that the white-capped ocean. Crow looked cautiously in that direction.

The ocean stretched out to a horizon veiled by approaching rain. Clouds the colour of smoke drove swiftly landward. In the evening light, Crow could see that the trail did not end at the beach. It led under dark water, and became the road into boundless sky. She suddenly sensed her lover waiting on that road, in the house where he brewed his storms. She pulled her thoughts back from him. She did not want to unleash too many storms upon the world. Passions must be restrained.

Still, he, being a god, had his own ways to find her. As she turned from the ocean, rain began to fall upon her face. Crow stopped, just for a moment, and closed her eyes so she could feel each cold drop.

Judith Berman, a newcomer to *Interzone's* pages, has sold a number of stories to the American magazines, *Asimov's SF* and *Realms of Fantasy*. She lives in Philadelphia, and works at the University of Pennsylvania. She says of the above tale: "It's based on the myths and traditional cultures of Native Americans of the north Pacific coast, which is my field of specialization as an anthropologist."

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A Dark Fantasist and Three Mainstreamers

Tom Arden



REVIEWED

We are often told that fantasy now outsells science fiction. Many of us are quick to deplore the fact, vehemently denouncing the tide of trash unleashed by publishers in the wake of Tolkien – a tide which frequently seems unending. Still, if fantasy is the stuff that sells, its opponents can console themselves that it's always sf that produces the hip, cutting-edge stuff, pushing back the frontiers of fiction while fantasists shuffle round their lazy clichés about furry animals and magic swords. I suspect this is no longer a tenable view – if it ever was – but those who hold it would be advised to take a look at China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan, £16.99), a novel which looks like sf in places but is ultimately – and gloriously – a fantasy of the most imaginative and extravagant kind, with not a hobbit in sight. If there is a fantasy equivalent of cyberpunk, this is it.

Like Miéville's much-praised debut, *King Rat* (1998), *Perdido Street Station* is a grotesque, gothic adventure played out against a vast and squalid metropolis. This time, however, the metropolis is not London but the fantasy city of New Crobuzon, where miracles and mysteries, weird technologies and magical machinations seethe through a labyrinth of pounding factories, reeking alleys, brothels and sewers. This is a place where humans share the streets with a bewildering array of strange species, including insect-people and cactus-men. In New Crobuzon, the punishment for crime is to be "remade" by hideous surgical procedures; monsters and mutants abound, and dark forces from the underworld erupt into reality.

The evocation of New Crobuzon, with its twisting network of railway lines converging on the sinister edifice of *Perdido Street Station*, is deeply impressive. Few cities in fantasy can have been imagined with such sheer detail and density. Better yet, Miéville never gets bogged down in explanations. There is no info-dumping. This a long novel – over 700 pages – but it moves at a cracking pace from the first.

The action kicks off when eccentric scientist Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin is visited by a humanoid bird-creature known as a garuda. Shedding his cloak, the garuda reveals that his wings have been brutally hacked away. Why this should be so, the garuda will not reveal, but he begs Isaac to find a way to give him back the power of flight. Since he needs the money, Isaac eagerly takes on the commission. Meanwhile, Isaac's insect-woman girlfriend Lin, an artist, has taken on a sinister-seeming commission of her own. Her task is to create a sculpture of underworld leader Mr Motley, a being made up of so many bits and pieces of different creatures that he is revolting even by the standards of

New Crobuzon. Both commissions lead to disaster. Soon Lin is in deadly danger, while Isaac's researches unleash a plague of monsters over the city, huge vampire-like creatures called slake-moths that suck out the minds of their victims. What's worse is that only unheroic Isaac and his hapless companions can save New Crobuzon, as the weirdness escalates into an orgy of perverse, violent, dark grotesquerie.

Perdido Street Station is not without flaws. As a vision of urban life, it is false. A great city – think of London or New York – is not simply a concatenation of filth but a place where extremes of filth and beauty, squalor and splendour, poverty and riches are dramatically mixed; Miéville is only interested

in the filth. Moreover, the setting overwhelms both the characters and the plot; in the end, what is most interesting is New Crobuzon itself, rather than what happens there or those to whom it happens. In a novel in which everything – I mean *everything* – is pushing at the outer limits of the bizarre, inevitably the law of diminishing returns sets in as Miéville piles on more and more excesses. I could add that the characters talk like working-class Londoners – men actually call each other "old son." There were times when I thought that something nasty had happened on the set of *EastEnders*. But this is quibbling. This is a big, bold, ambitious book which will undoubtedly be a success. If there will be readers whose stamina for the extravagant horrors by no means matches the author's, I suspect there will be many more who devour *Perdido Street Station* as eagerly as a slake-moth descending on its victim.

Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin notwithstanding, I've often thought it must be great to be a scientist. Back in my undergraduate days, a science student once said to me, "I'm exploring the origins of life itself. What are *you* doing?" The implication, a rather belligerent one, was that I was doing nothing – or nothing worthwhile. Since I was an arts student, this was probably true. There is no doubt that scientists are the pinnacle of humankind; the rest of us can only envy their superiority. Of course, there may be those pretences of "moral debate" or "public concern" when some creepy new bit of biotech is unleashed, but we all know that's just a sideshow – isn't it? This is certainly the view of the shady boffin-types who manipulate events behind the scenes



in David Ambrose's sf thriller, *The Discrete Charm of Charlie Monk* (Macmillan, £10).

"What can be done will be done," says shady boffin-in-chief. "People argue over should and shouldn't, but it makes no difference. If it *can* be done, it *will*." But what, precisely, has been done to Charlie Monk? When we first meet Charlie, he appears to be a secret agent of the most fanciful type, an intrepid action-man diving from helicopters, dodging explosions, and spending his free moments in romantic clinches with numerous beautiful women. If anyone lives out the James Bond fantasy, it's Charlie. But something is wrong with Charlie's brain. Increasingly he is plagued by memories – or what appear to be memories – of another life. Cue Susan Flemmyng, idealistic medical researcher whose attempts to help brain-damaged patients have led her into advanced areas of VR. Susan's work, involving the construction and implanting of false memories, is financed by a mysterious quasi-government body known as the Pilgrim Foundation. In the interests of defence – or so they say – the Foundation is constructing an army of super-agents, brainwashed to do their bidding.

Charlie, it turns out, is the prototype of this army, and Susan's research has been used to create him. Now, as Charlie starts to rebel against his controllers, Susan is called in to bring him into line. Appalled at what has been done with her humanitarian research, nonetheless she cannot refuse to obey her paymasters – especially after they kidnap her young son. What follows is increasingly strange, twisting and turning through a complex maze of VR and top-secret biotech, as Susan struggles to escape from the Pilgrim Foundation, and Charlie seeks to find out who – or what – he really is.

David Ambrose is a screenwriter, and it shows. If his prose tends to be colourless in places, and some of his characters – Susan in particular – seem to be just waiting for actors to fill them out, this is also an action-packed mystery in which nothing is as it appears to be and another shock is always lurking around the corner. Both a clever deconstruction of the James Bond mythos and a vertiginous, postmodernist take on *Flowers for Algernon*, this is a very good book – and, I suspect, an even better film, just waiting to be made.

Messing about with the human brain is also a theme in two very different novels, A. D. Harvey's *Warriors of the Rainbow* (Bloomsbury, £10) and Frank Tallis's *Sensing Others* (Hamish Hamilton, £9.99). Both are curious books, and the first curious thing about them is that – like

David Ambrose's book, for that matter – they are published as mainstream novels, with never a mention of the dreaded terms "science fiction" or "fantasy." This is good or bad depending on your point of view. On the one hand it shows that, in our science-obsessed society, some sf themes are now well and truly legit; on the other, it shows that nothing could be worse for would-be literary novelists than to be tarred with the brush of genre. But sometimes it might be better if they were.

A. D. Harvey is a case in point. Harvey's previous publications are works of academic literary criticism. *Warriors of the Rainbow*, his first novel, is set in the near future when Britain has been gripped by a perpetual winter and social order is rapidly breaking down. When the novel begins, the unnamed hero has been in prison for four years. Emerging to a radically changed world, he is devastated to discover that his girlfriend Imogen has died. It emerges, however, that she has never been buried. Instead, she has been taken to a research station where new, experimentally enhanced brains are implanted into the bodies of corpses.

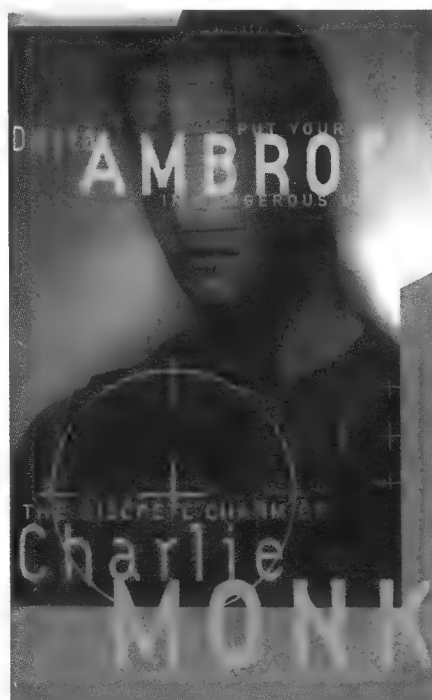
The being which now inhabits Imogen's body is not, in any sense, the real Imogen. But the hero cannot control his obsession with her, and helps her to escape. Meanwhile, as the climate worsens, animals are beginning to turn on human beings. Whales send Morse code messages to the world, revealing that they are behind the climate changes – something to do with shifting round the krill in the ocean – and now seek a meeting with a representative of humanity. The new, enhanced Imogen is the one they seek, and the message they shall impart is that humans have never, in truth,

been masters of the earth, but only pawns in the service of a greater evolutionary end.

This is a brief, strange, dream-like novel, told in impressionistic fragments of narrative, interspersed with factual mini-essays about the characteristics of whales and other animals. Imagine a cross between John Christopher's *The World in Winter* and one of Heathcote Williams's ecological books and you will have some idea of what Harvey is doing. The novel contains passages of real power, but too much of it simply doesn't work. Considered as sf, *Warriors of the Rainbow* is lacking in logic and frequently absurd; while compared with any great fantasy or horror parable it is cluttered and inelegant. The pop-science bits get in the way, relentlessly editorializing on the story rather than letting it speak for itself; the many lapses into bathos destroy any awe or fear that Harvey manages to evoke. More than once I thought of Daphne du Maurier's story "The Birds," a classic on the nature-fights-back theme, which succeeds at every point where Harvey fails.

There is a revealing moment when Harvey tells us that Imogen "had a deep scratch on one fore-arm, and her blouse was ripped off one shoulder, just like in the cover of a 1950s trash novel." Trash novel? That's a bit rich, given that the most evocative images in this supposedly literary piece – the perpetual winter, brain transplants, killer animals; there is even a reference to the world tilting over on its axis – come from precisely the kind of fiction the author and his publisher would appear to despise. But the irony rebounds on them. If it were more of a genre novel, and informed by greater awareness of its genre, *Warriors of the Rainbow* might be good – instead of just an interesting failure.

Frank Tallis presents us with a different kind of failure. Like his first novel *Killing Time*, which I reviewed in *Interzone* 151, *Sensing Others* is essentially a comic novel of character which edges towards sf – through a use of scientific themes – without ever quite getting there. In the last novel, I admired the mingling of sf and character-study; this time, I wish Tallis had stuck to the sf. The new novel concerns shiftless young rock musician Nick Farrell, who supplements his meagre income by participating in drug trials for a pharmaceutical company. Quite what these drugs might do to him, Nick has no idea; but given that he is paid £200 a week to take them, he doesn't much care – until he begins to experience some strange psychological effects. It seems to Nick that he can enter the minds of others, in an unbidden and terrifying telepathic communion.



As the drugs take hold, Nick veers between his two central relationships, with his much older girlfriend and mother-figure Cairo – former 1960s model and sometime bed-partner of Jimi Hendrix – and his bosom mate and father-figure Eric, one-time prog-rock star, now an extremist eco-warrior, and keen to enrol Nick in the cause. It is here, rather than in the half-hearted drug theme, that the core of the novel lies. Tallis's subject would appear to be the moral commitment of the 1960s generation, as opposed to the believe-in-nothing blankness of modern youth. Accordingly, this is a novel saturated in the '60s nostalgia of a hero who was not even born at the time.

Tallis no doubt intends the eco-warrior theme to contrast tellingly with his presentation of the rapacious, amoral multinational drug company.

These elements never seem properly meshed. It is when he adds a gay serial killer to the mix, however, that the novel comes unstuck. Throughout, Tallis's laddish, hetero hero displays a certain fascination with homosexuality; but once Nick has seen inside the killer's mind, and knows that the killer is after him, *Sensing Others* degenerates into a lurid fantasy of homosexual panic, infused with disgusted contempt for the abominable perversions of queers. Given that this is the first-person narrative of a drug-addled and rather stupid young man, one would like to take all this as irony. I tried hard. But this, after all, is a novel about the degradation and squalor of the modern urban world – a world, incidentally, against which Tallis can pit only a sentimental evocation of doped-out hippies of the type

who have patently failed to save us in the past, and are obviously not going to do so in the future.

In a novel which deals, among other things, with nuclear waste, mental asylums, environment-wrecking multinationals and London property prices, it is striking that the locus of evil is a gay club, and the most evil character a gay man. For all I know, there are plenty of gay serial killers. But I couldn't help thinking that the number of nice, normal hetero lads who are stalked, raped and murdered by gay men must be small, especially when compared to the number of gay men who are beaten senseless, at the very least, by nice, normal hetero lads.

Tom Arden

<http://freespace.virgin.net/tom.arden>

It was the expressed ambition of A.C. Swinburne to build a house with seven towers, each dedicated to the cultivation of one of the Capital Sins. Thither he would repair at intervals, to practise the sin of his choice. Aho! The attractions of lust, gluttony and sloth are obvious enough, and I suppose with a little application one could wring some enjoyment out of avarice, pride and rage; but envy – I have yet to meet a practitioner who was other than thoroughly miserable.

Nevertheless, it's the first sin to be explored in *Sinning in Sevens* (Simetria, Cascais, Portugal; no price shown) the fourth in the series of English translations back-to-back with the Portuguese originals, of which I reviewed the first in *Interzone* 115, this collection being allegedly themed to the seven sins. I have to say at once that the translation (not separately credited, so presumably that of the editors, Silvana Moreira and Anonio de Macedo), is if anything worse than in 1996, which makes the experience a bit like trying to appreciate pictures badly in need of restoration. There's surely something better under those layers of cracked varnish and cigar smoke, but how much better?

Having finished it, I feel bound to conclude, not a lot better. The sinful connection is rarely as obvious as the envy in Luis Miguel Sequeira's "Worthy of a Master," which is one of those tedious efforts where the persecuted hero finds himself confronted with no end of hard decisions, only for the whole business to be exposed as a series of tests, which he triumphantly passes. I thought Colin Kapp had done for the entire sub-genre with "The Bell of Ethiconia," but word of that story may not have reached Portugal.

Sequeira's story is at least coherent, which is more than can be said for some of the others, but the only item I was able to read with real pleasure

Strange Fantasies

Chris Gilmore

was Norman Spinrad's "La Cuisine Humaine," which is not really a story at all, but a taxonomic approach to the whole of terrestrial cookery in a mere 20 pages. Spinrad's culinary taste is evidently very like my own, but even he is not immune to his editor, who manages to render "unprepossessing" as "unpresupposing," whatever that may mean. Altogether, this series is an engaging idea, ruined by wretched execution.

However much we admire the Great Victorians, we find their sense of humour quite alien. How could anyone ever have chuckled over those over-detailed *Punch* cartoons, with their six-line captions? Or the leaden repeated rhymes of Edward Lear's limericks? Or those stories about gentlemen sitting on their own hats? Or those other stories, whose punchline depends on the assumption that all Irishmen are dim-witted, Frenchmen cowardly, Germans drunk, Italians excitable, negroes lazy, and peasants of all nations unsophisticated?

With this in mind, one would give little for Brian Stableford's chances in translating Paul Féval's *Vampire City* (Sarob Press, £20), a French humorous novel from 1875, heavily dependent on jokes about Irish violence and insensitivity, and English self-regard; yet it worked for me, and I think it may work for others. This is partly because the translation is quite excellent; Stableford has neither tried to bring it up to date with ill-fitting neologisms, nor attempted Victorian pastiche. His is a smoothly running vehicle for the timeless conveyance of literary French into literary English, and the matter conveyed happens to have gained rather than lost relevance over the years, this being an early example of a generic spoof directed at the conventional vampire tale. It uses as its framework a typical Victorian romance about the wicked designs of covetous, concupiscent foreigners on the scrupulously unsullied honour and lawfully inherited fortune of a well-bred young English girl; and the English principals are, of course, at a fearful disadvantage from the start. Being English, they play a straight bat – a feeble implement to "contend with an unscrupulous fraudulent bankrupt, a female living in sin and a vampire" – and isn't that a combination to daunt the stoutest?

Moreover, this vampire isn't just any vampire, but a small army in himself. Count Dracula had his modest harem of undead Carpathian beauties, but M. Goetzi doesn't only drink the blood of his victims "like lemonade" (as an admirer puts it); he assimilates them with a thoroughness that Mike Moorcock's Miss Brunner could only envy. Wherever he goes, his victims go with him; part avatar, part allegory, wholly slave, he keeps them folded into himself as conveniently as stack-up chairs, and as easily deployed. Moreover, for no obvious reason, each

may be deployed as two entities – handy if you need two stalwarts to carry a corpse, or two parrots to peck at an enemy's eyes. (The parrots are all that remains of a miserly Jew, incidentally, just as a couple of small boys are all that remains of a foppish young army officer; Féval's jokes may work, but they're of his time.)

A skit of this kind can very easily lose coherence, but Féval manages to keep control through a steadfast adherence to the literary conceits practised by Ann *Mysteries of Udolpho* Radcliffe (the Anne Rice of her time, as Stableford notes) and literary comedy tends to wear rather better than most. Féval is surely a minor figure, but he deserves his resurrection; and while Stableford is right to describe him as a distant progenitor of *Buffy the Vampire-Slayer*, he also, and I think more significantly, belongs to the great tradition that runs from Fielding (*Shamela*) through Peacock to Tom Sharpe and *Red Dwarf*.

Having considered a sophisticated Frenchman, let's turn to an Englishman who's been playing off a straight bat for half a century, as I noted when reviewing E. C. Tubb's *Death God's Doom* in *Interzone* 151. In *The Sleeping City* (Cosmos Books, £6 or \$12, B-format) we have a sequel of similar length, played no less straight, and glorying in its resemblance to Robert E. Howard's Conan novels. It's a great book for a short flight, with King Malkar having to contend with three magicians (one good, one bad, one neutral), two wicked kings, a jewel of evil potency, a monster with hypnotic powers and a couple of theocrats (Klesh and Rhyillos) who are ringers for Matai Shang and his daughter, Phaidor.

It's a measure of the distance we've come that while John Carter would never have two-timed the divine Dejah Thoris, Malkar takes Rhyillos with very little hesitation and no remorse at all – well, he's away from home, and though he dearly loves his wife, she's currently in a time-warp, and anyway, he *isn't going to tell her*, all right?

Tubb can't claim to have brought anything very new to the party, but this, no less than its predecessor, is efficiently crafted by a man who knows precisely what he's doing, without pretention and at modest length. Now, just how many S&S novels can justly claim that?

Finally, Wildside Press offers two books by Darrell Schweitzer: *We Are All Legends* (\$15), first published in 1981, and *Necromancies and Netherworlds* (\$30 and \$15), the latter with Jason van Hollander.

Legends just about qualifies as a fix-

up novel, in that although it's written as a series of discontinuous episodes, there's a sense of progression and a conclusion. Moorcock's Elric stories make up a novel in much the same way, and these stories also appeared separately in a variety of magazines and anthologies before being collected in 1981. Nor does the similarity end there, for the protagonist, Sir Julian the Later and Lesser Apostate (as he styles himself) has a similar sense of damnation, deriving from the murder of one who loved him.

As is often the way with Schweitzer, one recognizes the superior quality of the writing immediately, without being able to define exactly what is so good about it. His vocabulary is extensive and well organized, his imagination offers a wealth of gruesome wonders, the rhythms of his prose always match the mood he wishes to convey. These are very significant skills, but even so, the whole seems greater than the sum of the parts. For in sober truth, when you come to analyze it, Julian's sense of damnation is rather undermined by his perception that there's really nothing to choose between God and the Devil – they're equally bad and equally mad. Having reached that conclusion, his continuing quest for entry into an afterlife which is neither Heaven nor Hell, but in some remote corner of the universe which both antagonists have neglected and forgotten, seems reasonable enough, but would be just as reasonable if he perceived himself as blest rather than damned.

On the other hand... I doubt that the adventures of a Calvinist who presumed himself to be of the Elect, and sought frantically to wriggle out of the eternal boredom laid up for him in Heaven, could be approached in quite

the same spirit – and if anyone wants to try that idea, first come, first served and my blessing (or curse if preferred – I'm easy) therewith.

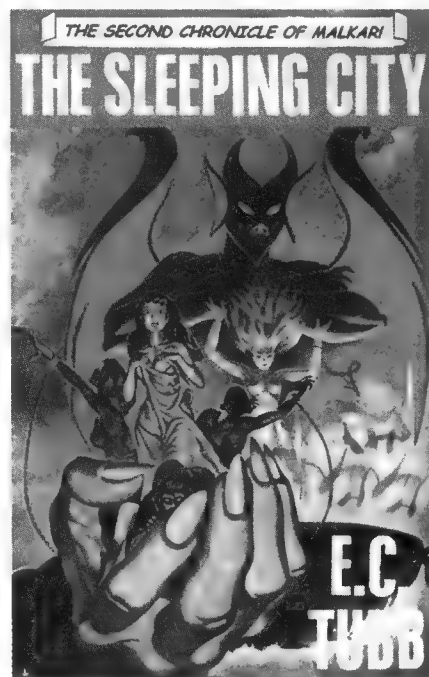
Schweitzer has come a long way since this book; Julian is fun, and quite interesting, but not as interesting as Sekenre. Even so, it deserves to be read for its own sake. In his introduction, Sprague de Camp claims that "the reader is left with the feeling that he has undergone a strange and haunting experience." I wouldn't pitch it quite that strong, but the experience of watching a youthful master at work is rewarding enough.

The central conceit informing the new collection, *Necromancies and Netherworlds*, is rather more original. In a single night the people of Zhamiir, an otherwise unremarkable S&S city, overthrew all their gods and embraced militant atheism – or anti-theism, rather; for though they themselves are overthrown and made captive, and their priests are disfigured and humiliated, the gods retain their numen, as the people are well aware. And numen can be applied in all sorts of ways.

These stories offer a lot more variety of tone than *Legends* (though it's extravagant throughout) but the underlying theme, of the continuing potency of the numinous in a context of variously heinous sin, is not that far removed, and offers the same tension between free will and compulsion which tends to underlie fantasy which has a theological dimension.

The Zhamiir stories make up somewhat over half the book, the remainder inevitably giving the impression of makeweights. Two of them are distinctly weak: "The Paloverde Lodge" is basically a rather thin ghost story, tricked out with a number of nudge-nudge references which only make it look pretentious, while "Those of the Air" is a very distant sequel to Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror," presented in terms of the standard dysfunctional family tale. The combination doesn't work, partly because such an idea needs to be worked out at much greater length, but mainly because the writers make the mistake of playing it straight when it could really only be made to work as satire. On the other hand, the final story "The Man in the White Mask" is played very much for savage humour, and consists of a hectic night in the world of Hieronymus Bosch as perceived by an homunculus, newly made homeless by a religious intolerance to which his father/creator would most certainly have contributed had his forces been locally in the ascendant. If you're at all uncertain about what is meant by "phantasmagoric," this tale will set you right – and it's worth the softback price all by itself.

Chris Gilmore



When squash- or tennis- or chess-players get together, they might well compete against each other in the game of their choice. When musicians get together, they might jam. But when artists and writers get together, let's face it, the chances are that they'll drink. Of course, a project might *develop* from a boozy encounter, but one would aim low if asked to guess how many stories or books, in the history of literature, have been concocted spontaneously and executed end to end by a team of two or more writers there and then. The scratch of fountain pen on paper, or the click of keys, is a solitary sound; not a *lonely* sound, because the voices are in one's head: little ghosts squeezing together, and trying to plump themselves up by feeding on the writer's attention. But notable exceptions – great novels by partnered authors – come by from time to time, although *White Mars* is certainly not one of them.

White Mars; or, The Mind Set Free: A 21st Century Utopia (St Martin's Press, \$22.95) is by Brian Aldiss "in collaboration with" Roger Penrose, and arrives with the oddest of stowaways, a Legal Advisor, name of Laurence Lustgarten. This is a book, therefore, that makes the reader sit up and think, before it has even been opened. The one thing that might be predictable about Aldiss, after all, is that he is difficult to predict; but what could possibly be so contentious or violent or sexy to have warranted the inclusion of a legal advisor? The mind is set free; but while reading, it is quickly shackled again as suspicions dawn – that actually, far from this being a radical new departure for Aldiss, this is a dull piece of mumbo-jumbo about an attempt to colonize science fiction's

Ghost Sandwiches

David Mathew

most fashionable planet – this season's planet.

"Is utopia possible?" the text asks. "Is it even desirable?" The advantages and disadvantages that the group which travels to Mars then encounters are examined. And there is nothing wrong with the authors' *ideas* (indeed, "The Debate on Sex and Marriage," Chapter 18, is rather interesting), but it is the presentation that seems all wrong; the chilly blandness of it all. In the opening chapters, the overwhelming impression, unfortunately, is one of age: "Was not... the opening-up of a new world part of a human dream, the dream of going forth to conquer space, as envisioned in many fictions, book and film, in which mankind went forward boldly, overcoming everything hostile which stood in its way, occupying planet after planet?" Quite so; which surely means that a fictional representation of the same should be fresh and clean; be something new. So loudly, in fact, do the joints of the plot creak that one even suspects the authors to have chosen developments (and even character names: Buzz, for example) in a sarcastic manner, to highlight something that will follow later on. Must be more, we think, and keep searching for the answers.

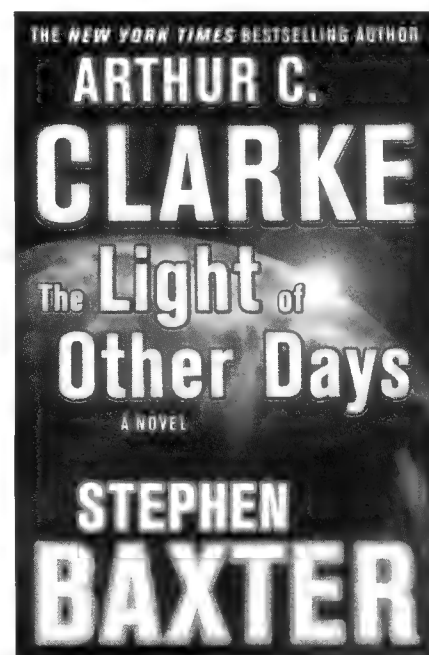
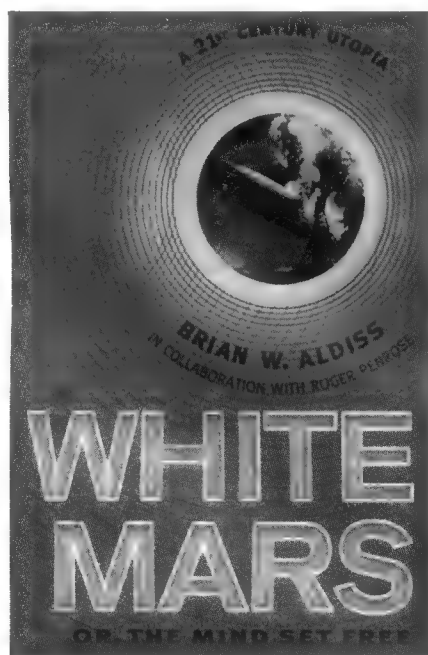
As indeed do the ones who become stranded on the planet. Subjects are chewed over, argued about; but while fully accepting that everything, even matters hitherto taken for granted, would cry out for discussion, do we really need the gobbets that are tossed in (it seems) to fill the paragraphs? Despite the number of narrators, there is very little change in tone throughout. On the subject of the Smudge project, which might lead to a way of challenging Einstein's theories, we get

a pointless speech, verbatim, on the dubious pros of technology – all of which are well-known. Later on, this: "we cannot expect the quarter of the terrestrial population that speaks a Chinese language to convert to English instead. Nor can we expect those whose faith is in Mohammed to turn into churchgoers of the Methodist persuasion." To be blunt, the heart deflates – the book's and the reader's – and one begins to suspect that this is actually rather pointless. There's a rudimentary vigour to the language, but not often; and even the legal advisor's role (and I'm assuming that the guy actually exists) is to write a character near the end of the text, so that is a disappointment too.

Racism, artificial limbs, thwarted love and the benefits of the "lighter Martian gravity" on one's sexual performance: all are described. *White Mars* is a jigsaw puzzle, of sorts, but the piece of fun has been missed out, has been lost. "How could the admirable restlessness of enquiry be satisfied by a utopian calm? How could our utopia maintain both stability and change?" the authors ask. Maybe Mars is a metaphor, one thinks; but after 300-plus pages it no longer really matters. *White Mars* is a terrible disappointment; one feels, at the end of this strangely unstrange novel, like a stranger in a land that is *not strange enough*.

The Light of Other Days (Tor, \$24.95) is another collaboration, between Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter, and is much more successful.

As readily acknowledged in the Afterword, the idea behind the book – that of the "time viewer," a way of glimpsing into days gone by – is not new to this novel; but the authors use



their tools well. At first the experiment secures the ability to see through walls, opaque objects, which of course (human beings being what they are) leads to an exploitation of what swiftly becomes known as a nunnish affectation for privacy. Before long, however, with a tweak-tweak here and a snip-snip there, the viewer is modified, expanded, made ridiculous – so that the user is able to see through *time*. Go back to spy on the life of Jesus Christ, why don't you; it's easy enough, after all. Enjoy yourself with the WormCam!

Hence the title. We see it clearly, this light; not only the ancient light that illuminated the past, but that from the past which shines into our present. A new voice and face for hedonism? Perhaps. Certainly, nothing is safe; and nowhere is one protected. Privacy becomes a thing of the past: "What privacy? Look around you. Already the kids are screwing in the street. In another ten years you'll have to explain what *privacy* used to mean." The time viewer is the equivalent of Internet pornography: easy gratification with relatively low maintenance costs. And if all fiction is an act of surveillance, this novel is surveillance on the act of surveillance. It expresses ideas about universality, and poses the question: given the chance, would everyone copy one another? Would we play together? Would we jam? Well, would we? In recent years Arthur C. Clarke has put his name to a number of collaborations, and some have been more successful than others; this one, however, is a winner.

Talking about looking into a fictionalized past, Gore Vidal once said, while referring to his own historical novels, that he took a figure of note and then, because attempting to write as that figure would be presumptuous (his word), he invented a character who would regard the figure and thereby pass comment, one step removed. It's an approach also used by Stephen Saylor, whose robust "Roma Sub Rosa" series takes a view of Rome in the last years of the dying Republic. In the series, which is told in the first person by "Gordianus the Finder, detective of ancient Rome," we might meet Cicero, Pompey, Caesar, Marc Anthony; but the narrator and his dealings with the public are more important. Each piece is simultaneously an excellent detective story, an erotically undertoned tale, and a depiction of a society in which the laughter of gods is taken for granted; in which human beings are playthings.

The latest is *Rubicon* (Robinson, £6.99). Another by-product of extensive research: clothes to conceal secret papers; abortion techniques; love

nests – we have no reason to doubt a thing. A murder is committed on the detective's property, and Gordianus is obliged to investigate. Pompey, fleeing south to avoid Caesar and his troops (already past the Rubicon, about to march on Rome) has the sleuth's son-in-love as a captive. And if a cracking storyline isn't enough, there is the unexpected bonus of humour, an ending which comes as a brilliant surprise, and even the occasional paragraph that sounds as though Raymond Chandler wrote it!

The eunuch's smile wavered. My eyes adjusted a bit to the dimness. Leaning against a wall a few feet behind the eunuch, I made out a bored-looking redhead. She, too, was familiar. Ipsithilla was already a fixture in the tavern the first time I stepped foot in the place, six years before, with the drunken poet Catullus...

Thank you, Robinson. And thank you, belatedly, Faber and Faber, for the reissue of Ted Hughes's *The Iron Man*, even if this time, as a movie cash-in, the title has been altered to the lopsided rhyme of *The Iron Giant* (£4.99) in deference to the Warner Bros. movie. Still: lovely and spiky and jelloed and warm. Reading it now, I am reminded of my first kiss with Dr Seuss: the same sense of magic; the incandescent sense that the world has nothing to do with what one actually sees. That there has to be more.

Vast and seemingly senseless at first, the iron man falls off a cliff and shatters; he picks himself up, his constituent parts unwilling (or unable) to live on their own; and then he goes to eat. Farm machinery is a favourite repast, which does not endear the iron man to the people of the area. At first,

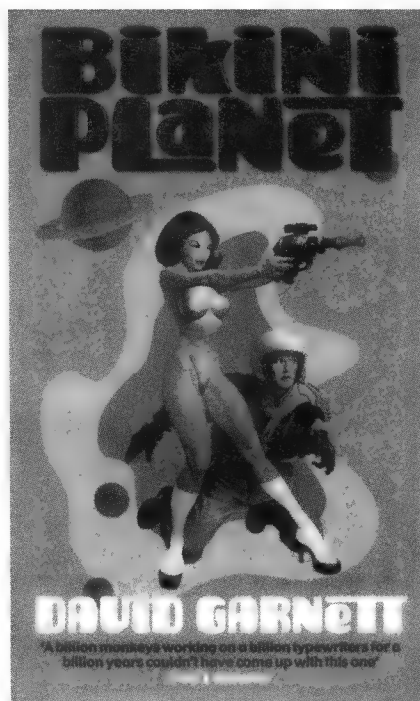
only one small boy actually likes him. Later on, once he's valiantly fought the monster from out of space, everybody loves him: and what a battle it is! If the iron man can endure the space-dragon's fiery breath, then the dragon must be able to deal with the heat from the sun. So in the iron man we have, despite early intimations to the contrary, a perfect hero-figure: brains and brawn. Call it *The Iron Giant*, who cares? It's thin, it's fun, it's a bucket of plot; I love it.

Lastly, humour for humour's sake. Some years on, it seems in keeping that my first introduction to the longer work of David Garnett, which was *Stargonauts*, occurred when I was wearing a filthy Bedouin smock, and a wig, and was waiting for a film director to ask me to mount my camel.

At the time, I was in the desert: an extra in an Egyptian production, having proved my mettle as Man-Nodding-at-Party in a TV potboiler, and my incendiary one-liner ("I'm sorry, I don't speak Arabic," which was then *dubbed*) in a catch-your-breath thriller about a missing child. Apparently. Well, film sets being what they are – pockets of activity in long, long trousers of boredom – we'd been advised to take along a book. Hence, *Stargonauts*; and midway through yet another hour of waiting, another extra, an Australian, picked up the book, regarded the cover, read a few words, and said expectantly, "Oh, I get it. It's a piss-take, right?"

With a wave of my arms I indicated the general environment – the mean-eyed camel and the wigs we both had on – and said, "And this isn't?" Like *Stargonauts*, David Garnett's *Bikini Planet* (Orbit, £5.99) is light-hearted, obsessive, original, sarcastic, brisk, and written in an effortless style that suggests a great deal of revision has taken place, but maybe hasn't. Who knows? Our eyes slide over this tale with glee: the story of a Las Vegas cop in the 1960s, who breaks up a crime involving (as a victim, he believes) his girlfriend's father. Our hero is frozen for 300 years, and when thawed is forced to reform his opinions about life. Initiated into the police again (as a GalactiCop), his plot becomes connected to that of Hideaway, a "leisure planet," hence the bikinis. Blue-skinned aliens (a female member of which race insists that she does not possess deformed genitals), and such creatures as a "red amphibian with webbed hands and feet, wearing a blue bikini"; and corruption, intrigue, and an old-fashioned guy not used to fast, futuristic women – all of these ingredients make up a nice brew. For simple fun, who could ask for anything more?

David Mathew

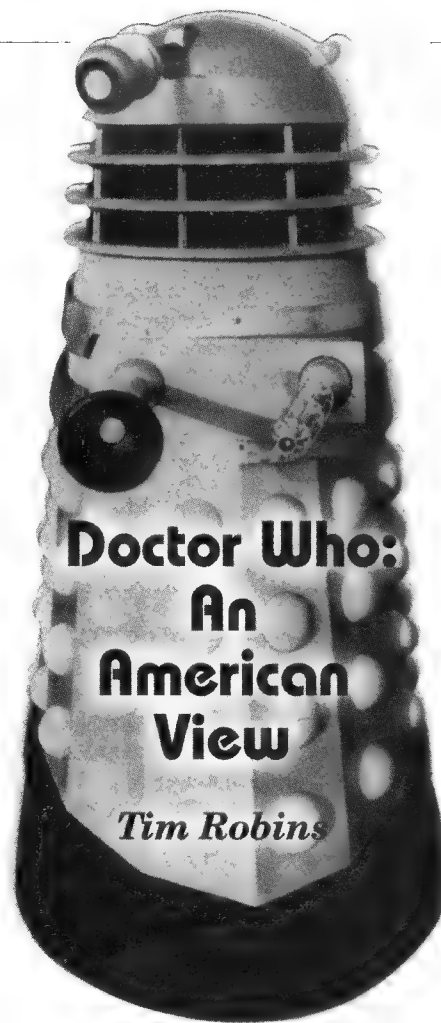


In retrospect, *Doctor Who* enjoyed relatively few moments of mainstream success. Its popularity and sophistication undoubtedly peaked with Tom Baker who, aided by intelligent scripts, garnered the series intellectual credibility by staring opened-mouthed into the middle distance. Those were the days when Harlan Ellison proclaimed, "*Doctor Who* is the apex, the pinnacle, the tops, the Louvre Museum," and Michael Moorcock unashamedly described it as "the finest venture into sf ever attempted by the visual media." Then it was all over bar the gurnying. Faced with a declining budget, poor scheduling decisions and a loss of faith among the BBC's senior management, nothing could save *Doctor Who* from descending into confusion and cancellation.

Now U.S. writer John Kenneth Muir has decided to explain over 30 years of luvvies and quivering latex to a North American audience unfamiliar with *Doctor Who*'s low-budget charms. Muir's book, *A Critical History of Doctor Who on Television* (McFarland, £48.75) gives an account of the programme's origins, lists and summarizes all the stories and provides background material on changes of cast, spinoffs and merchandise and the series' growing fan following. His "history" is critical to the extent that he reviews every story screened, makes an assessment of their contribution to television science fiction and tries to identify their potential appeal to an American audience for whom, as he points out, "*Doctor Who* made no concessions whatsoever."

In a similar way, Muir's book makes no concessions to a UK readership. Here the *Doctor Who* market place is well stocked with authoritative works, amateur and professional. The fan part-work *Doctor Who: In Vision* (formerly *Doctor Who: An Adventure in Space and Time*) has been chronicling the series story by story, an issue a month for the last 20 years. In the professional sphere, the painstaking researches of fans David J. Howe, Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker have replaced Peter Haining's cut-and-paste bargain-bookstore fillers with attractive, authoritative and entertaining works such as *Doctor Who: The Sixties, Seventies and Eighties* (Virgin, three volumes), *Doctor Who: The Handbook(s)* (Virgin, seven volumes) and, most recently, *Doctor Who: The Television Companion* (BBC).

While Muir acknowledges "*Doctor Who* historians and scholars whose many knowledgeable works provide the foundations on which this text is built," his own book is a rather shaky edifice. Reference works call for patience and pedantry. Even small mistakes can undermine the author's authority. There are quite a few of errors of fact. For example, the first



Doctor Who: An American View

Tim Robins

Dalek story was set on the planet Skaro not Thal, and "The Tenth Planet" has not "been all but destroyed" (episodes one to three are available on videotape). The book's typographical errors provide a quirky humour all of their own. Those of you who thought that Tom Baker was accompanied on his travels by a robot dog will be intrigued to discover that his companion was in fact a "cybernetic pub" (hic). I think the Fourth Doctor would have appreciated a mobile drinks cabinet that dispensed screwdrivers at the first sight of a monster; Daleks look a lot less scary from the bottom of a bottle of vodka.

Muir does draw some thoughtful parallels between *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, but without archival data is really in no position to say whether these similarities are direct influences or simply two melodramas drawing from the same limited stock of clichés. This book is not the first *Doctor Who* reference work to be published in the U.S. – that honour probably belongs to John Peel's and Terry Nation's *The Official Doctor Who and the Daleks Book* (St Martin's Press) – but it is the most comprehensive and could at least provide a starting point for fan scholarship in that country, much as early fanzines did in this.

What *Doctor Who* really needs now is the kind of analysis that Kurt Lancaster applies to science fiction and fantasy artefacts in *Warlocks and Warpdrive: Contemporary Fantasy Entertainments with Interactive and Virtual Environments* (McFarland, £24.40). This book is largely a collection of conference papers exploring the different kinds of imaginary worlds available today and how these imaginary worlds interact with the real world. Lancaster's examples include themed environments such as the CD-movie *Wing Commander IV*, on-line excursions to *Babylon 5*, shopping trips to *Forbidden Planet* and hack-and-slash role-playing in a Boston forest. Usefully, he doesn't confine himself to genre worlds, but extends his analysis to other imagined spaces such as heritage museums.

Joanna Russ has noted the affinity between science fiction and environmental art. Lancaster takes her observation further by examining the symbolic creativity of fans and the political possibilities of the environments they seek to recreate in their lives. He does not imply fans cannot distinguish between fact and fiction, even when recounting the case of Barbara Adams, the Whitewater juror who turned up at a U.S. district courthouse wearing a *Star Trek* uniform. Instead he suggests, "Adams created an intersection between the multiple meanings of American jurisprudence and Captain Picard's Federation law... the *Trek* universe became reality within the world of the courtroom," and thereby offering a potential critique of a flawed American legal system.

Lancaster is by his own admission "hooked on performance studies and scholarly writing." The advantage of this is that he keeps his account of simulated environments rooted in the material culture of everyday life, although he resorts to the occasional inappropriate metaphor courtesy of postmodern cultural studies. Books may seem to transport us to other worlds, but in real life readers are not travellers. There is little more sedentary than reading a book.

Lancaster's work is a significant contribution to the study of the merchandise-saturated and commodified worlds we find ourselves visiting at work and play. What is needed now is further analysis of the kind that recognizes the persistence of the real in the imaginary worlds of the nearly real and evaluates the appropriateness of putting particular fictions into practice. In short, if I were on trial, I would be more than a little worried by a juror whose understanding of the complexities of human social relations might be filtered through the platitudinous homilies of *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Tim Robins



BOOKS RECEIVED



FEBRUARY
2000

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in *quotes* following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers, and Ron Leming. **The Gutbucket Quest.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86463-9, 288pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; another of Anthony's charitable collaborations [his 22nd!]) with an unknown writer; this one concerns blues music and black magic; in his brief but remarkably candid afterword, Anthony says: "I am not certain that what I am doing with these collaborations is right, either technically or socially, but hope that it is... The world may not care whether *The Gutbucket Quest* exists, but I do." May 2000.

Bisson, Terry. **In the Upper Room and Other Likely Stories.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87404-9, 284pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; 16 funny, ingenious tales by a writer who is described as "in the tradition of Vonnegut and Twain"; most first

appeared in *Playboy*, *Omni*, *F&SF* and *Asimov's*.) May 2000.

Brin, David. **Foundation's Triumph.** "The Second Foundation Trilogy. Authorised by the Estate of Isaac Asimov." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-000-8, 440pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Sf share-crop novel, first published in the USA, 1999; third of a trilogy written by separate hands: the other volumes are Gregory Benford's *Foundation's Fear* [1997] and Greg Bear's *Foundation and Chaos* [1998]; reviewed by Nigel Brown in *Interzone* 149.) 2nd March 2000.

Brindley, John. **Scissorman.** "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-01304-6, 171pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Young-adult horror novel, first edition.) February 2000.

Bunch, Chris. **The Empire Stone.** "The spectacular new fantasy epic." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-965-2, 359pp, C-format paperback, cover by David O'Connor, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 2000.) 2nd March 2000.

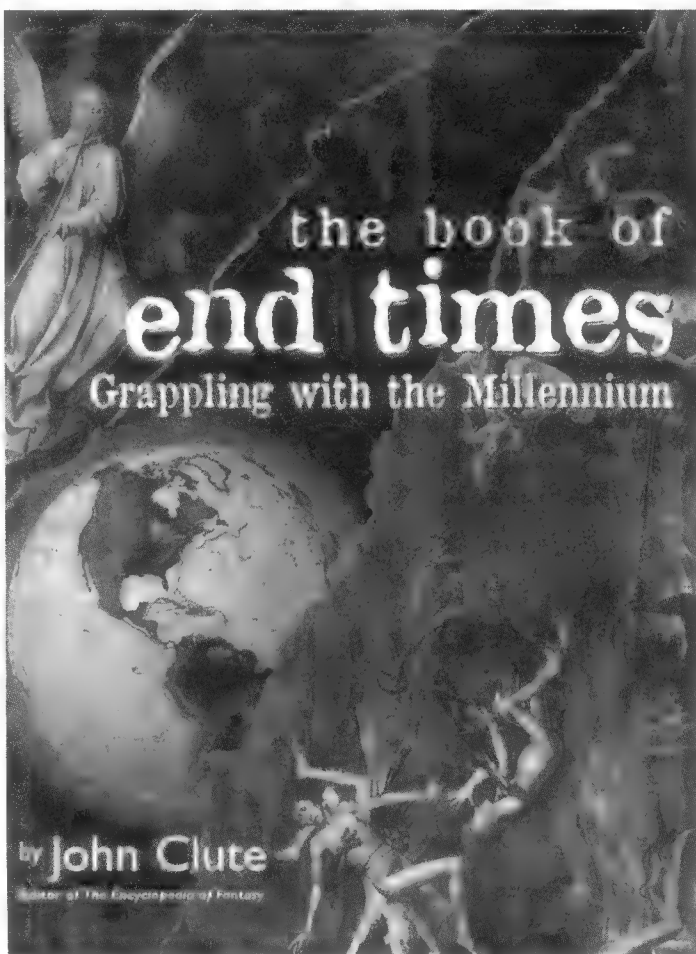
Cholfin, Bryan, ed. **The Best of Crank!** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86739-5, 320pp, trade paperback, cover by Pangorda, \$14.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first published in 1998; 17 stories, all copyrighted 1993-1996, all reprinted from one of the more praised U.S.

small-press magazines of recent years, including work by Brian Aldiss, A. A. Attanasio, Michael Bishop, David R. Bunch, Karen Joy Fowler, Gwyneth Jones, R. A. Lafferty, Ursula Le Guin, Jonathan Lethem, Lisa Tuttle and Gene Wolfe, among others; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 136.) 7th February 2000.

Clement, Hal. **The Essential Hal Clement, Volume 2: Music of Many Spheres.** Edited by Mark L. Olson and Anthony R. Lewis. Introduction by Ben Bova. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886788-07-8, 506pp, hardcover, cover by the author, \$25. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains 17 stories by the author who is fairly universally regarded as "the exemplar of hard science fiction"; the earliest, his first published story, appeared in *Astounding SF*, June 1942, and the most recent dates from 1987; "Hal Clement" is the pseudonym of Harry C. Stubbs [born 1922]; another worthwhile NESFA volume.) February 2000.

Clough, Brenda W. **Doors of Death and Life.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87064-7, 268pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; follow-up to *How Like a God* [Tor, 1997], and described by its publishers as "part political thriller, part fantasy, part near future SF, part family drama... exciting and thoughtful, a literate excursion into 'The X-Files' territory"; the author, Brenda Wang Clough, born 1955, previously had novels published by DAW Books.) May 2000.

Clute, John. **The Book of End Times: Grappling with the Millennium.** HarperPrism, ISBN 0-06-105033-4, 240pp, hardcover, \$30. (Large-format, copiously illustrated meditation on all things Millennial; first edition; a British edition was promised but seems not to have appeared; an interesting work which unfortunately fell rather flat because it was released just before Christmas with minimal publicity [and apparently very few, if any, review copies distributed]; it's worth quoting the blurb: "Drawing on the pervasive icons of pop culture and the sweeping themes of literature, art, religion, and philosophy produced during the last millennium, Clute cleverly interweaves word and image... Here are the visions of artists including Albrecht Durer and Hieronymous Bosch brought together with verses from Shakespeare and William Blake, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, here are images of humanity's spiritual touchstones, including Stone-



henge, Tibetan prayer wheels, and the Tarot, interspersed with selections from Kurt Vonnegut, D. H. Lawrence, W. B. Yeats, and other intellectual luminaries"; it's sometimes difficult to follow Clute's text amidst all the layout, the typographic razzmatazz, but... highly recommended.) *Late entry: November 1999 publication, received from the author in February 2000.*

Collins, Paul. **Cyberskin.** Hybrid Publishers [PO Box 52, Ormond, Melbourne, Victoria 3204, Australia], ISBN 1-876462-11-6, vi+248pp, A-format paperback, cover by Marc McBride, A\$14.95. (Sf novel, first edition; British-born Australian author Collins, who has been active since the 1970s, has written many short stories and children's books, and edited numerous anthologies, but this appears to be his first adult novel.) *17th April 2000.*



Crowther, Peter, ed. **Moon Shots.** Introduction by Ben Bova. DAW, ISBN 0-88677-848-4, viii+312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chesley Bonestell, \$6.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; published to mark the 30th anniversary of the first moon-landing, it contains all-new stories by a fine line-up of authors, many of them British: Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown, Paul Di Filippo, Scott Edelman, Alan Dean Foster, Colin Greenland, James Lovegrove, Paul J. McAuley, Ian McDonald, Robert Sheckley, Brian Stableford, Gene Wolfe and a few others; recommended.) *Late entry: July 1999 publication, kindly sent to us by the editor in February 2000.*

Di Filippo, Paul. **Joe's Liver.** Cambrian Publications [PO Box 41220, San Jose, CA 95160-1220, USA], ISBN 1-878914-11-1,

313pp, hardcover, cover by Arturo Sinclair, no price shown. (Humorous novel by a well-known sf/fantasy writer, first edition; a beautifully produced small-press item, in a limited run of 300 signed copies; see the interview with Paul Di Filippo elsewhere in this issue of *Interzone*.) *No date shown: received from the author in February 2000.*

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Furthest Horizon: SF Adventures to the Far Future.** St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-26326-0, xiv+478pp, trade paperback, \$17.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; a companion anthology to Dozois's last-month's title, *Explorers: SF Adventures to Far Horizons*, it contains reprint stories on the distant-future theme, chronologically arranged from 1950 to 1998, by Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson, Joe Haldeman, Alexander Jablovkov, Paul J. McAuley, Ian McDonald, Michael Moorcock, Frederik Pohl, Robert Reed, Keith Roberts, Robert Silverberg, Cordwainer Smith, James Tiptree, Jr, Jack Vance, Walter Jon Williams and Gene Wolfe; in his interesting preface, Dozois comments: "Why so many Brits write far-future stories, and why so few women do, way out of proportion demographically in both cases, I'll leave for wiser critics than me to try to puzzle out" [among the "Brits" not represented in this anthology but mentioned by Dozois in the preface, are H. G. Wells, William Hope Hodgson, Olaf Stapledon and Arthur C. Clarke].) *May 2000.*

Erikson, Steven. **Gardens of the Moon: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-81217-3, xvi+712pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; a Big Commercial Fantasy debut, and the beginning of a proposed ten-volume series; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 147; the Canadian-born author lives in Britain, and is not confused with the well-established American novelist Steve Erickson [born 1950], who has written some works bordering on sf and fantasy.) *16th March 2000.*

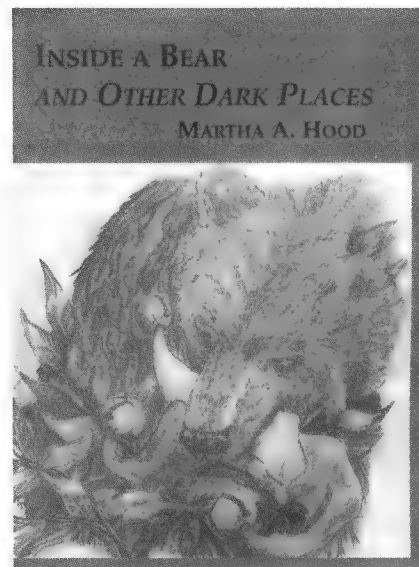
Gemmell, David A. **Hero in the Shadows.** "Featuring the epic hero Waylander." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04435-5, 328pp, hardcover, cover by John Bolton, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to Gemmell's earlier "Drenai Saga.") *9th March 2000.*

Haining, Peter, ed. **Knights of Madness: Further Comic Tales of Fantasy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-958-X, xii+324pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in 1998; 24 reprint stories, including work by Woody Allen, John Kendrick Bangs, L. Frank Baum, Peter S. Beagle, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, G. K. Chesterton, Philip K. Dick, Jerome K. Jerome, Spike Milligan, A. A.

Milne, Mervyn Peake, the inevitable Terry Pratchett, Tom Sharpe, James Thurber, Ben Travers, Mark Twain, Donald E. Westlake and Gene Wolfe; as with the previous two anthologies in this series, some of the stories are what we would regard as sf rather than fantasy – including the one by Jerome K. Jerome, "The New Utopia" [from *Punch* – Haining says it dates from 1891, but internal evidence suggests a magazine appearance in 1889], which is a mordant little satire on egalitarianism anticipating Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" and many similar works.) *2nd March 2000.*

Harry, Eric L. **Invasion.** "China is the new world power and she wants to prove it." Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-64894-5, 572pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Near-future war novel, first published in the USA [?], 2000; the author is American and has published two or three previous books, though this is the first we have seen; like most such military thrillers, it's pitched at the mainstream market, even if the subject matter seems essentially similar to that of Robert A. Heinlein's old sf potboiler, *Sixth Column* – an Asiatic invasion of the USA.) *2nd March 2000.*

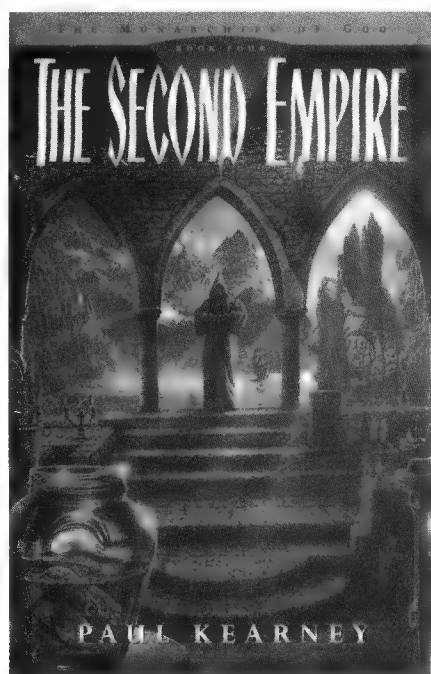
Hood, Martha A. **Inside a Bear and Other Dark Places.** Introduction by Eric M. Heideman. Stone Dragon Press [2402 University Ave. W., #504, St Paul, MN 55114-1701, USA], ISBN 1-929611-00-5, xii+217pp, trade paperback, cover by Jennifer Menken, no price shown. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; a debut book by a California-resident writer who should be better known; of the 20 stories, two first appeared in *Interzone* ["Learning the Language" and "Dust to Dust to"], two are original to the book, and the bulk of the remainder first appeared in a US small-press 'zine called *Tales of the Unanticipated*; a nicely-produced item; recommended.) *Late entry: 1999 publication, sent to us by the author in February 2000.*



Jensen, Jan Lars. **Shiva 3000**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-78081-7, 326pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £9.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1999; a debut novel by a new Canadian writer [we published a story by him in *Interzone* 101], it's described by the publishers as "a timeless fantasy," though the title and some of the blurb's descriptive details suggest sf – akin to Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*!) 24th March 2000.

Kearney, Paul. **The Iron Wars: Book Three of The Monarchies of God**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-942-2, 255pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 146.) 9th March 2000.

Kearney, Paul. **The Second Empire: Book Four of The Monarchies of God**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06574-5, 294pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 16th March 2000.



King, Stephen. **The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-76559-3, 292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £5.99. (Horror novella, first published in the USA, 1999; a mixture of horror, baseball lore and babes-in-the-wood sentiment; this reprint has been fattened out with large print and wide line-spacing; there's also a 40-page "taster" from King's later book, *Hearts in Atlantis*, at the rear; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 143.) 2nd March 2000.

Light, John. **Light's List 2000**. Photon Press [37 The Meadows, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1NY], ISBN

1-897868-07-8, 62pp, paperbound, £2. (Alphabetical listing of current literary and fiction magazines, mainly small-press; 15th edition; it's an A5-size, stapled booklet, with photocopied text; the sub-title, as given on the front cover, reads: "World wide list of titles, addresses and a brief note of interests of over 1450 independent press magazines publishing poetry, short stories, articles, artwork and market information in English"; the details of each title are sparse, and not always as up-to-date as they should be [e.g. the publisher of *Alfred Hitchcock's* and *Ellery Queen's* mystery magazines is given as "Davis Pubns" – an outfit which ceased to exist several years ago]; nevertheless, for its sheer scope, and its very low price, this is a useful listing, ranging from the smallest of the small presses to professional magazines such as *Asimov's*, *F&SF* and *Granta*; recommended as an information resource for aspiring writers.) *Late entry: January publication, received in February 2000.*

Llywelyn, Morgan, and Michael Scott. **Etruscans: Beloved of the Gods**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86627-5, 335pp, hardcover, cover by Boris Vallejo, \$24.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; a first collaboration between these two Irish-based authors, it concerns early Roman history and the legend of Horatius; Morgan Llywelyn, she of the oh-so-Welsh name, is actually American but lives in Ireland; Michael Scott, an erstwhile Dublin bookseller, is best known for his books of Irish legendry.) March 2000.

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope: Defilers**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87261-5, 446pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; follow-up to *Necroscope: Invaders* [1999] – which we don't recall seeing – in this ever-extending pulp-style adventure-horror series by a British writer who seems to be more popular in the USA than the UK.) May 2000.

McDevitt, Jack. **Slow Lightning**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224735-6, 435pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Infinity Beach*, 2000; it comes with a splendid encomium from Stephen King, addressed to the general reader, in which he says, "You're going to love it even if you think you don't like science fiction.") 6th March 2000.

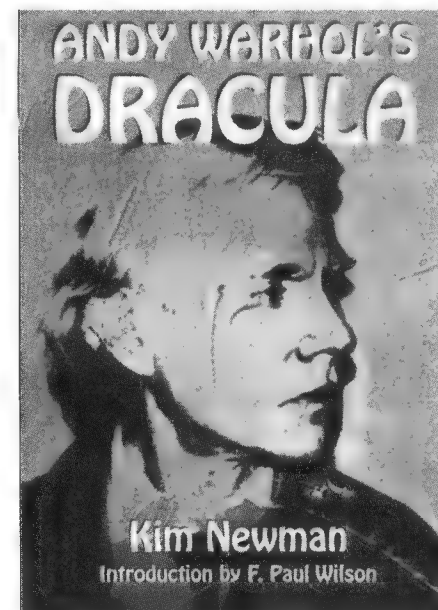
Marco, John. **The Jackal of Nar**. "Book One of Tyrants and Kings." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-869-8, 916pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1999; Big Commercial Fantasy by a new American author who comes with commendations from Allan Cole and J. V. Jones; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 145.) 9th March 2000.

Morgan, Rupert. **Let There Be Lite**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04548-3, 350pp, C-

format paperback, cover by John Alexander, £9.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer [born 1965] who has already had some success, apparently, as a film critic and as an author of children's stories; Fay Weldon and... uh... Prunella Scales commend this novel on the back cover.) 9th March 2000.

Nagata, Linda. **Vast**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-57506-902-3, 359pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; scientifically-informed space opera, set aboard "the *Null Boundary*... a giant biotech starship," this is the author's fourth novel, and her first to be published in Britain; it follows [but is not a sequel to] *The Bohr Maker*, *Tech-Heaven* and a third that we never saw, *Deception Well*.) 16th March 2000.

Newman, Kim. **Andy Warhol's Dracula**. Introduction by F. Paul Wilson. PS Publishing [98 High Ash Drive, Leeds LS17 8RE], ISBN 1-902880-04-8, 66pp, trade paperback, £8. (Horror novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £25 [not seen]; all copies are signed by the author; a piece of prime Newman, literate and funny – a pity we didn't see it sooner.) *Late entry: 1999 publication received in February 2000.*

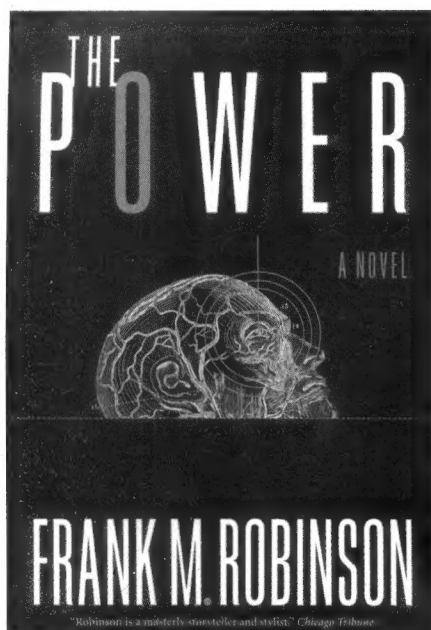


Parker, K. J. **The Belly of the Bow: Volume Two of the Fencer Trilogy**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-960-1, 521pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999.) 2nd March 2000.

Rickman, Phil. **Midwinter of the Spirit**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-37401-X, 539pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1999; a follow-up to Rickman's last novel, *The Wine of Angels* [1998], featuring

the same central character, the female exorcist Reverend Merrily Watkins; we didn't see the hardcover edition last year.) 10th March 2000.

Robinson, Frank M. **The Power.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86654-2, 222pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1956; this new edition is slightly revised; Robinson's debut novel, and a minor classic of the sf/thriller crossover genre, it was filmed in 1967.) 2nd March 2000.



Robson, Justina. **Silver Screen.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-37566-0, 471pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1999; a debut novel by a new Leeds-based British author; short-listed for this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 150.) 24th March 2000.

Sawyer, Robert J. **Calculating God.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86713-1, 334pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the 12th novel by this writer who has become the leading Canadian sf author, it is described by editor David Hartwell in the accompanying publicity letter as "the story of aliens arriving on Earth with scientific proof of the existence of God... We expect it to be one of the more successful sf novels of the year.") June 2000.

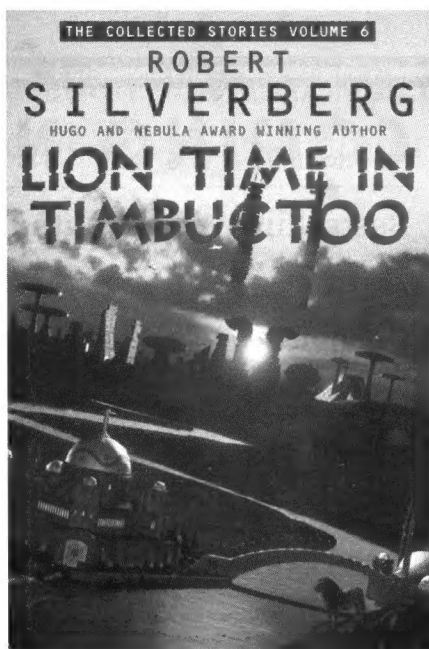
Silverberg, Robert. **Lion Time in Timbuctoo: The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg, Volume Six.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651220-8, 390pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf collection, first edition [?]; a pendant to the author's earlier five-volume set of selected stories, it contains newer pieces, all first published in the 1990s, with copious authorial notes; most of the stories first appeared in *Asimov's*, *Omni* or *Playboy*.) 20th March 2000.

Smith, Gary A. **Uneasy Dreams: The Golden Age of British Horror Films, 1956-1976.** Foreword by James Bernard. McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-7864-0604-6, ix+267pp, hardcover, \$49.95. (Illustrated, annotated filmography of UK horror movies during the period specified; first edition; the author is American; sterling-priced import copies should be available shortly in Britain from Shelwing Ltd, 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BH; another nicely-produced volume from McFarland, in their larger format.) May 2000.

Smith, Michael Marshall. **The Vaccinator.** Introduction by M. John Harrison. PS Publishing [98 High Ash Drive, Leeds LS17 8RE], ISBN 1-902880-06-4, 51pp, trade paperback, £8. (Horror novella, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £25 [not seen]; all copies are signed by the author; reviewed [from a bought copy] by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 153.) Late entry: 1999 publication received in February 2000.

Stableford, Brian. **The Fountains of Youth.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87206-2, 352pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; an expansion of the author's much-praised 1995 novella, "Mortimer Gray's History of Death.") May 2000.

Stasheff, Christopher. **The Haunted Wizard: Book VI in A Wizard in Rhyme.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39248-5, 375pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alan Pollack, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; not to be confused with Stasheff's near-simultaneous novel in a different but similarly-titled series, *A Wizard and a Warlord* [Tor, February 2000], listed here two months ago.)



Late entry: 4th January publication, received in February 2000.

Straub, Peter. **Mr X.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-225955-9, xiv+483pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1999; Stephen King blurbs it as Straub's "triumphant return to the tale of the supernatural"; it appears to have Lovecraftian content, and may even be this distinguished author's stab at a "Cthulhu Mythos" novel.) 20th March 2000.

Tarr, Judith. **Lady of Horses.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-86114-1, 415pp, hardcover, \$25.95. ("Prehistoric romance" [that's what the publishers call it], first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to *White Mare's Daughter* [1998] and *The Shepherd Kings* [1999] in Tarr's sequence of novels about the first horse-tamers and riders [who were probably the proto-Indo-Europeans, our linguistic ancestors], circa 4,000 BC.) June 2000.

Theaker, S. W. **Professor Challenger in Space.** Silver Age Books [56 Leyton Rd., Birmingham B21 9EE], ISBN 0-9537650-0-8, 158pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf sequel-by-another-hand, first edition; an attractive little paperback with a black-and-red cover; it carries a long subtitle: "Being a sequel to the events described in *The Lost World*, *The Poison Belt* and other stories of Professor Challenger by Arthur Conan Doyle (but ignoring the scurrilous anti-science lies of *The Land of Mist*)"; since Doyle died in 1930, and copyright has now been extended to 70 years after an author's death, his works are not due to come out of copyright until January 2001 [or so we are led to believe] – so Silver Age Books may be jumping the gun a bit here; an accompanying letter states that this novel "was first made available to the public, albeit in a photo-copied 'folderback' edition, about two years ago. This is the first commercially available edition.") March 2000.

White, James. **The First Protector: Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict.** Ebury Press, ISBN 0-09-187263-4, 284pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 2000; the TV series in question is based on unproduced scripts written by Roddenberry in the 1970s and "developed" by his widow, Majel Barrett Roddenberry.) 9th March 2000.

Williamson, Jack. **The Silicon Dagger.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-54042-5, 336pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; the astonishing Mr Williamson, well in his 90s and a published sf writer for 72 years, forges on towards the 21st century; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 145.) Late entry: January title received in February 2000.



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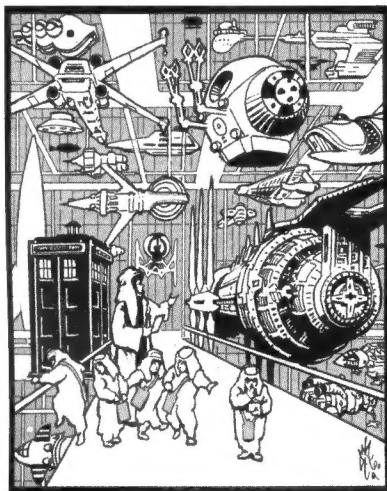
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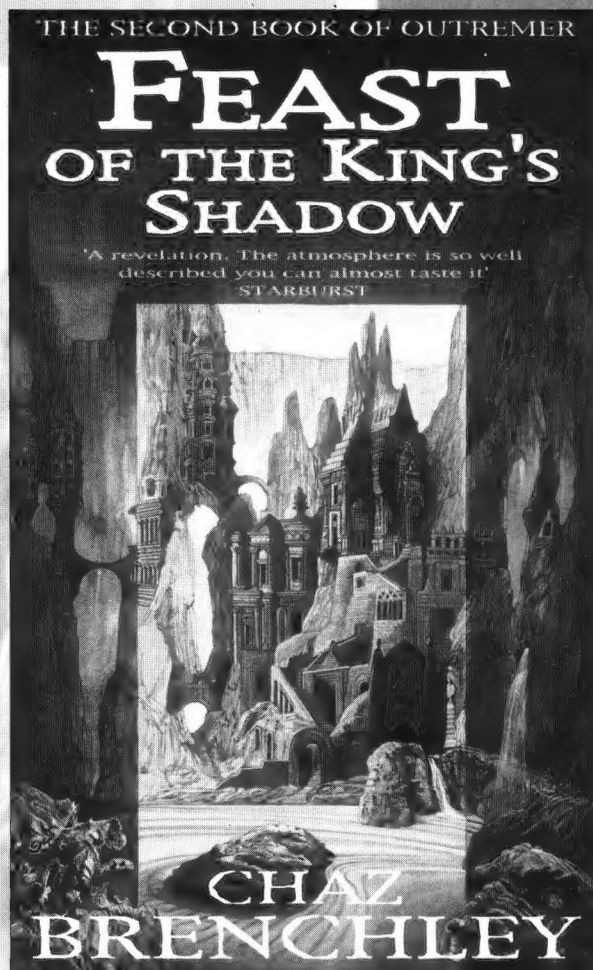
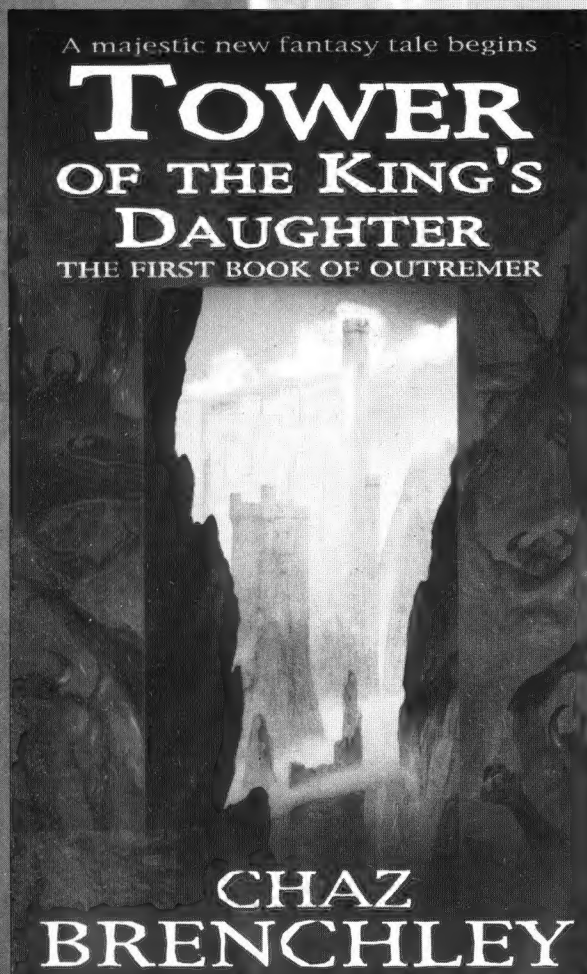
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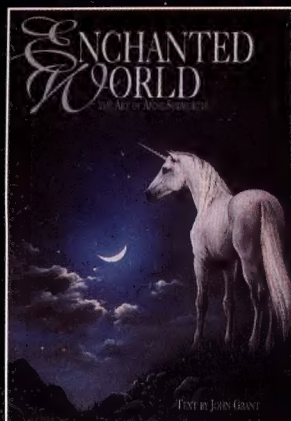
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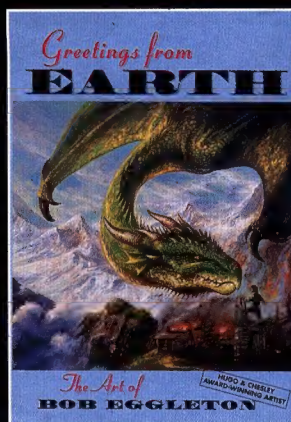
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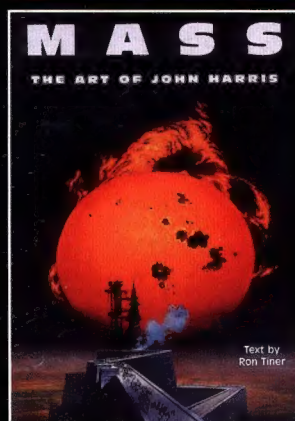
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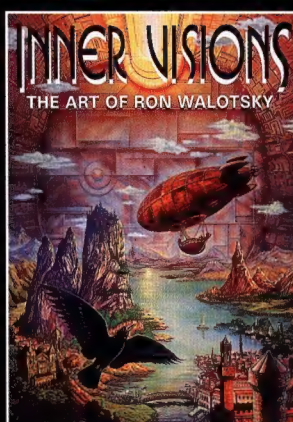
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